Integrating High-Impact Tutoring with Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

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Executive Summary

Districts across the nation use Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) to target appropriate supports for each student. High-impact tutoring is the most effective research-backed academic support – consistently demonstrating from six months to over two years of learning gains for students across grade levels and content areas in a single year of tutoring.

Districts that have chosen to integrate high-impact tutoring with MTSS are finding that embedding this highly effective support into the fabric of their schools improves student outcomes, reduces implementation challenges, improves instructional coherence, and streamlines operations.

Interviews across a number of schools, districts, and experts in the field identified critical steps to successfully integrate high-impact tutoring with MTSS without long-term additional capacity. Action steps include state level efforts, such as reviewing and shifting any conflicting guidance in state policy, district level efforts, such as defining and setting expectations for alignment and implementation, and school level efforts, such as ensuring implementation with fidelity.

This brief can help you learn about the benefits and action steps if you plan to integrate high-impact tutoring with MTSS. It includes:

- A Description of High-Impact Tutoring
- A Description of MTSS
- The Case for Integrating High-Impact Tutoring with MTSS
- Action Steps for States, Districts, and Schools
- Examples of Implementation

Given the September 2024 deadline to obligate ESSER funds, now is a critical time for education agencies to plan for more effective support of students for the long run. Using high-impact tutoring as a delivery structure within a system’s MTSS framework could dramatically improve student learning and reduce inequities in students’ experiences and outcomes without substantial additional costs; yet, it requires careful planning, resource allocation, and ongoing monitoring.

Share your knowledge! Please submit any feedback, questions, or suggestions HERE.
A Description of High-Impact Tutoring

High-impact tutoring is a highly effective approach for accelerating student learning, and for improving student well-being and engagement in school. High-impact tutoring can be effective for students with a range of needs. Substantial research has assessed effectiveness of this approach for students with reading and math deficits in early grades and math deficiencies in later grades. High-impact tutoring also positively affects academic success and social behavior outcomes for students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs).

However, not all tutoring is high-impact. The evidence base shows that specific features of high-impact tutoring, when implemented with fidelity, result in academic gains for a wide variety of students:

- **embedded into the school day**
- **at least three sessions per week of 30-50 minutes** for most students, though young children (e.g. kindergarten and 1st grade students) may benefit equally from shorter sessions
- **small group size** ideally one-on-one but with no more than four students
- **consistent tutors** who are effective at building relationships and receive oversight and coaching
- **data used** to identify students’ needs and inform tutoring sessions
- **materials aligned with research and state standards**; if Tier I instruction uses high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), high-impact tutoring uses the same or similar HQIM-aligned materials

Tutoring does not replace participation in full-class grade-level instruction; it complements such instruction with additional support to prepare students to access grade-level content successfully. Teachers, paraprofessionals, or others who are appropriately trained can all deliver high-impact tutoring.
A Description of MTSS

MTSS is a framework used by schools and systems to differentiate educational experiences for students in order to support learning and social, emotional, and behavioral development. The framework has four components:

1. Universal screening identifies students who need additional academic, social, emotional, or behavioral support.
2. A multi-level prevention system provides integrated, evidence-based support to students.
3. Progress monitoring uses valid and reliable tools to assess achievement, quantify improvement or responsiveness to the intervention, and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention, instruction, and support.
4. Team-based data analysis informs decisions about instruction and intervention.

The multi-level prevention system, which is an essential component of MTSS, includes Response to Intervention (RTI) — the academic component of tiered supports — where students receive “just-in-time” academic support across three tiers:

- Tier I: universal supports for all students through grade-level instruction
- Tier II: strategic support for identified students who need targeted skill development to support access to grade-level instruction
- Tier III: intensive support for students needing more intensive support or not responding to Tier II interventions

Additionally, adults receive support in identifying, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating supports across the three tiers to ensure a holistic experience for students.

Some school systems use the RTI model without the broader MTSS approach, while others have fully adopted the MTSS framework. We will use the term MTSS in the rest of this document, but schools and systems using RTI without the complete MTSS can still leverage the recommendations outlined.

MTSS is intended to meet the needs of all learners, including but not limited to students with IEPs. While we have seen some confusion about the relationship between MTSS and Special Education, the MTSS framework is not a special education initiative. However, students can receive targeted services through a special education program and receive targeted resources and instruction through MTSS. Coordination between MTSS and special education services - for example by having special educators as part of a school’s MTSS team - can improve the effectiveness of both MTSS and special education. Additionally, students with IEPs identified for Tier III supports, can receive data-based individualization at Tier III, while accessing Tier I instruction and Tier II supports in additional areas of need. Data from implementing MTSS can be used, depending on state requirements, for special education referrals and in developing a student’s IEP. Effective implementation of MTSS can also support Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and schools in meeting requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
The Case for Integrating High-Impact Tutoring with MTSS

Despite the compelling logic of MTSS, implementation challenges often inhibit effectiveness. An evaluation of the RTI model, the predecessor to MTSS, found that only a few schools actually implemented critical elements of RTI, and, as a result, RTI did not significantly improve student outcomes. Another study in Milwaukee found that only 69% of studied schools actually implemented the multi-tiered instruction component.

Even when schools do implement tiered supports, they often select interventions that are not evidence-based or select several different interventions to meet individual student needs, which makes them challenging for the school to implement on the ground. High-impact tutoring has been proven to drive results for multiple student needs, has clear research-proven implementation guidelines, and can be designed to address the foundational skills students need in order to access Tier I instruction.

MTSS could be more effective if schools implement the tiers with supports proven to provide substantial impact, including high-impact tutoring.

High-impact tutoring highly aligns with the central tenets of MTSS:

- High-impact tutoring, like MTSS, promotes individualized, data-informed instruction, collaboration, and communication among adults to ensure an integrated student learning experience.
- High-impact tutoring requires using valid data to understand students' needs, to ensure instruction directly addresses the skills needed for success in grade-level content, and to monitor student growth to ensure tutoring has the intended impact.
- High-impact tutoring requires adjustment as needed, as well as regular engagement with teachers to ensure that tutoring and classroom instruction are cohesive and complementary.

Despite the alignment between MTSS and high-impact tutoring, many schools and systems deliver high-impact tutoring separately from their MTSS efforts, complicating implementation for those on the ground. Now that high-impact tutoring is demonstrating effectiveness, schools can address implementation challenges and improve effectiveness by combining student support efforts through one dedicated team where school leaders, teachers, and others review the school data and identify strengths and weaknesses of student progress. Using these data, they can assess effectiveness across the three tiers of support and promote more effective alignment by ensuring Tier II and Tier III support classroom instruction by addressing foundational skills or upcoming grade-level content that students need to progress in grade-level Tier I instruction.

Schools can align MTSS and high-impact tutoring by using tutoring in Tier II and Tier III as follows:

- Tier I: universal support for all students: using high-quality instructional materials, with support within the instruction for struggling learners, and embedding approaches to improve attendance, behavior, and social-emotional skills.
• Tier II: strategic support for identified students: using small-group tutoring grounded in the principles of high-impact tutoring to support students failing to succeed in Tier I instruction
• Tier III: intensive support: using 1:1 tutoring grounded in the principles of high-impact tutoring to support students not responding to Tier II support.

The MTSS team could use a universal screener aligned with the core curriculum to identify students who need Tier II and Tier III support through tutoring, and then set up systems and processes to collect progress monitoring data using aligned assessments. The team would use these data to ensure that students regularly move out of those tiers as they progress in the skills identified, with the goal of supporting as many students as possible on their way to thriving with solely Tier I support. Additionally, effective collaboration with special educators on the MTSS team would ensure that students with IEPs appropriately receive identified supports in their IEP through MTSS and special education programming.

The team could assess effectiveness of their MTSS program by analyzing student movement across the three tiers. For example, if the team sees more than 20% of students identified for Tier II or Tier III support, this would identify a need to improve Tier I instruction, ensuring explicit support within the Tier I instruction for struggling students. If few of the students move back to solely Tier I instruction after spending time with Tier II or III, then this could be an indication that these supports are not as effective as they should be. See the Examples of Implementation for more information.

Integrating high-impact tutoring with MTSS would reduce implementation challenges, increase instructional coherence, streamline operations, and provide students with the most research-backed support when they need them:

• Reduces implementation challenges: Schools could simplify implementation by integrating high-impact tutoring with MTSS rather than operating them separately. The evidence base for high-impact tutoring provides a clear delivery structure with defined components that drive academic growth. As a result, integration would provide a defined, replicable structure for implementing tiered supports. Additionally, this integration would address the typical logistical challenges faced in schools — which include finding time during the school day for high-impact tutoring, and staff to support the implementation — by using time and educators already dedicated to MTSS.

• Increases instructional coherence: While research is not yet conclusive, anecdotal reports support the idea that students benefit when tutoring aligns with and builds from what they experience daily in their classroom. Thus high-impact tutoring that uses high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) aligned with the classroom curriculum, could improve instructional coherence. Instructional coherence requires all elements of an instructional program that a student experiences throughout the day to advance the student toward grade-level mastery. Many systems adopt interventions for Tier II and Tier III supports that are not aligned with the instruction students receive in the classroom. High-impact tutoring, aligned to a school’s HQIM, can be used in a system’s MTSS framework to ensure students build foundational skills needed to advance in grade-level Tier I instruction. Using assessments aligned to HQIM can support educators in identifying the gaps in individual students’ skills, as well as providing focused interventions that enable these students to build foundational skills for success in grade-level
instruction. High-impact tutoring addresses the specific skill gaps identified. Utilizing high-impact tutoring that builds skills needed to access core instruction would improve the ability of all adults to collaborate on monitoring and responding to student progress, by streamlining the school’s efforts to collect and review student data through assessments that precisely assess those foundational skills needed to advance in Tier I instruction.

- **Streamlines operations**: Integrating MTSS and high-impact tutoring rather than operating both MTSS and high-impact tutoring separately can streamline operations, thus freeing up capacity to serve more students. It would also streamline the number of staff used and the amount of professional development needed by having one delivery structure for MTSS that includes high-impact tutoring. This integration would allow SEAs and LEAs to better leverage a larger group of funding sources, including Title I, IDEA, and Title II.

Students would benefit from improved academic achievement, as the reduction in implementation challenges better enables schools to implement high-impact tutoring and MTSS with fidelity. Increased instructional coherence is more likely to improve student outcomes than an uncoordinated approach, and tutoring aligned with effective Tier I instruction can reduce the number of students assigned to special education. High-impact tutoring in prevention support would likely have long-run benefits for students and improve graduation and employment.

### Action Steps for States, Districts, and Schools

To support the implementation of high-impact tutoring within an MTSS framework, **SEAs can:**

- **Set a vision and ensure alignment at the state level**: Develop a holistic vision for aligning all student supports and identify high-impact tutoring as an effective structure for implementing Tier II and Tier III support. Build buy-in and cohesion across relevant departments (e.g., academics, special education, student support, and school improvement teams) so that guidance from all departments is consistent and aligned with the state’s vision for student support. SEAs can also mandate requirements, such as requiring students who fail the state test to receive intervention support or requiring assessing all students in specific target grades and providing intervention support for identified students.

- **Review and change conflicting state-level guidance**: Review existing guidance that could conflict with efforts to integrate high-impact tutoring and MTSS (e.g., personnel requirements) and update this guidance to support implementation. Simplify funding sources, and provide more flexibility, by reviewing policies and processes related to federal grant administration (e.g., application templates, grant guidance, etc.) and remove barriers, such as developing one process for LEAs to access state funding to ensure maximum funds to support high-impact tutoring/MTSS integration. See the following guides as additional resources:
  - Developing Effective Guidance: A Handbook for State Education Agencies
    - This handbook offers recommendations for developing federal grant-related guidance.
Provide incentives: Require LEAs to create a plan for how they will support schools’ efforts to identify, serve, and routinely monitor the supports provided to students in need through MTSS; and incentivize districts to adopt HQIM, to align supplemental instructional materials with materials used in core classes, and to use tutoring as the delivery structure. Determine whether additional state funding is available for LEA implementation, and award this funding through a competitive grant process that ensures implementation of high-impact tutoring aligned to the key components. Consider developing additional programs to incentivize tutoring, such as offering a pathway to teaching certification for tutors or incentivizing teacher education programs to include tutoring as part of their field experiences in schools.

Support LEA implementation through guidance and training: Build an understanding of how to leverage HQIM for core and supplemental instructional materials to build instructional coherence, and provide guidance and training to educators and school support staff for how best to use HQIM and aligned materials across the three tiers. Dispel misconceptions about MTSS and high-impact tutoring, and build an understanding of the evidence base for high-impact tutoring and its components. Provide examples of how an LEA could use tutoring to implement Tier II and Tier III instruction, including how to identify students and what data to use to ensure that students move fluidly through the tiers. Consider creating a community of practice structure for LEAs to promote productive conversations around how to integrate tutoring into MTSS, and leverage districts with effective implementation as mentors to other districts. Provide a list of recommended vendors based on meeting the components of high-impact tutoring.

Develop a process for collecting data and conducting evaluation: Provide centralized support to districts for setting up systems to collect and share data on who receives tutoring, at which tiers of support, and how students are moving through tiers of intervention. Regularly evaluate and report on these data to assess the effectiveness of integrated efforts, and identify bright spots and areas for improvement. Mandate MTSS data collection standards and conduct audits of the district’s MTSS data collection practices.

To support the implementation of high-impact tutoring within an MTSS framework, LEAs can:

Define and set expectations for alignment and implementation: Conduct an audit of current intervention systems used across the district. Define high-impact tutoring as a structure to implement Tier II and Tier III support. Consolidate teams supporting high-impact tutoring and those in charge of MTSS implementation. Define resources for school implementation of high-impact tutoring within MTSS, including staff and curriculum. Align curricular resources to promote coherence and consistency by ensuring that universal screeners align with the curriculum scope and sequence and that foundational skills trackers align with assessment materials. Create expectations and guidance for routine integration of high-impact tutoring.
progress monitoring data into collaborative teacher planning meetings, tools, and protocols to support teacher teams in acting upon these data.

- **Provide training, and dedicate ongoing support to schools:** Provide explicit training that builds an understanding of the evidence base, the components of effective high-impact tutoring, and how to implement high-impact tutoring within a school’s MTSS framework aligned to the core curriculum. Dedicate centralized support by ensuring that district staff are responsible for coaching schools on the implementation of high-impact tutoring and MTSS, troubleshooting challenges, and increasing the effectiveness of tutoring efforts. Develop guidance to ensure that enabling conditions are effectively set up at the school level, including adjusting the master schedule to ensure groups align with the ratios for high-impact tutoring, and implementing processes to measure how effectively these conditions are implemented within schools. Provide centralized training, where possible, so tutors can effectively deliver instruction aligned to HQIM and serve students with diverse learning needs (multilingual learners, students with IEPs, etc.).

- **Streamline funding and find sustainable funding sources:** Conduct an audit/inventory of funding used across the district to identify ways to leverage the available federal funds and ensure sustainable sources for funding. See Beyond Recovery: Funding High-Impact Tutoring for the Long-Run for U.S. Department of Education grants that can pay for tutoring, which lists common grant-related misconceptions that can trip up tutoring efforts even when not paid for with grant funds.

- **Ensure a structure to collect data:** Track which students are being tutored at each school to clarify how many students are receiving tutoring and who is providing that tutoring (external vendor, in-school support, etc.); and collect data on fidelity of implementation to ensure alignment to components of high-impact tutoring (by frequently updating tutoring session attendance rates by school and by program, keeping a tutor log of reasons student miss sessions, and collecting tutoring implementation observation data).

- **Develop a culture and systems for continual improvement:** Create procedures for tracking the success and challenges of implementation, and regularly publish results and next steps to district stakeholders (parents, teachers, principal supervisors, school board, etc.). Share bright spots from implementation across the district to continuously encourage and motivate school teams. Conduct regular audits to assess effectiveness, and investigate disparities or disproportionality across students' cultural, racial, and socioeconomic demographics.

To support the implementation of high-impact tutoring within an MTSS framework, school leaders can:

- **Lead with relationships:** Develop supportive relationships among all educators, students and caregivers through clear and ongoing communications to ensure a cohesive experience that keeps the students and their caregivers at the center of instructional decisions.

- **Ensure implementation to fidelity:** Implement tutoring with fidelity to the model, and follow the protocols and resources provided by the vendor or the district — request support from the
Integrating High-Impact Tutoring with MTSS

The Time Is Now

Successful integration of high-impact tutoring and MTSS has the potential to dramatically improve student learning and reduce inequities in students’ experiences and outcomes; yet, it requires careful planning, resource allocation, and ongoing monitoring.

Given the September 2024 deadline to obligate ESSER funds, now is a critical time for education agencies to plan for more effective support of students who are furthest behind in order to address issues of inequities and overall low achievement through leveraging high-impact tutoring in existing systems. Thoughtful planning can help systems leverage federal funds where they can; this type of planning is critical, because it is harder for systems to leverage federal funds for initiatives that are already covered through existing district or state funds.
Examples of Implementation

Baltimore City Public Schools: In 2019, Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) received funding through Maryland’s progressive school funding legislation to implement small-group tutoring to provide transitional supplemental instruction. After assessing their current systems, BCPS determined that their Tier I instruction, which leveraged high-quality instructional materials, and their Tier III student support, provided by student support teams, were well defined. However, they had a gap in their Tier II services, as the district lacked a consistent structure for schools to implement these supports. Following the tenets of high-impact tutoring, BCPS custom-designed a coherent tutoring solution leveraging paraeducators to work with up to four students at a time for 30 minutes, five days a week, using HQIM aligned to the Tier I foundational literacy curriculum. The district provided each school within a pilot network with three paraeducators to support the implementation, and has since expanded this internal tutoring model to an additional network of schools. All paraeducators received training on implementing the foundational literacy program from the curriculum vendor and routine coaching support from two central program managers. The district also leveraged data to ensure continual improvement of tutoring by building a system for tutors to track not only tutoring session attendance, but also bi-weekly progress monitoring data that enabled these metrics to be monitored centrally in real time. The district then set clear implementation goals, and used these metrics to center all meeting structures on monitoring progress toward meeting these goals at every program level. Data collection efforts on SY22–23 tutoring outcomes by BCPS showed that, on average, students in grades K–2 who received tutoring through the district’s internal model demonstrated higher rates of growth on the DIBELS 8 assessment from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, as compared to students not enrolled in these supports. These promising results required regular assessment and adjustment to continually improve effectiveness. Lessons learned from the team at BCPS include the importance of the following:

- **Alignment across the district:** BCPS invested substantial time in building knowledge and understanding of MTSS tiers, their meaning, and high-impact tutoring principles. Guidance created by the team lays out processes and integrates them into existing structures, such as aligning their language with the messaging communicated by the math and literacy departments. The BCPS team developed a guidebook to support this implementation that explicitly states the behaviors adults can enact to support successful implementation.

- **Continual improvement:** District staff built systems with data at the district, network, school, tutor, and student levels. This process for continual improvement allowed the team to adequately assess the effectiveness of implementation and provide program management support to schools needing more help with implementation of these efforts. The team developed a rubric to support program manager coaching of school leaders to provide clear guidance to address the most common challenges.

- **Leveraging bright spots:** While change management can be challenging, especially for a school district the size of Baltimore City Public Schools, the team quickly learned the importance of leveraging bright spots as a model to support schools struggling to implement these Tier II supports through tutoring. The team also learned the importance of aligning their ongoing data reporting to the district’s principal supervisory structure, thereby enabling principal supervisors...
Integrating High-Impact Tutoring with MTSS to see and celebrate implementation bright spots within their school network, identify specific schools or implementation trends that needed improvement, and ultimately hold school leaders accountable for improving their fidelity of implementation.

**Grand Forks, North Dakota:** Grand Forks Public Schools earmarked ESSER funds for high-impact tutoring during the pandemic to address pandemic learning loss. A partnership with Littera Tutoring provided tutoring in reading and math in grades K-8. In the initial implementation, schools implemented tutoring through many different avenues, including as part of their MTSS system and 21st-century after-school programming. While they saw gains for students across all structures, the most significant gains happened for students who experienced tutoring during the school day. With this information, the team stopped offering tutoring outside the school day and formalized it as the delivery method for Tier III support within their MTSS framework. The team concentrated tutoring in Tier III due to the intensity of the tutoring model and to target students who most needed recovery of standards, offering 90-150 minutes of 1:1 tutoring support a week (broken up over 3-5 sessions per week) for 8-12 weeks. Across the district, schools could choose in-person tutoring or virtual synchronous tutoring to deliver Tier III support—interventionists who leveraged the existing curriculum provided targeted support for students identified for Tier II.

Schools used star assessments and teacher input to identify students. Star assessments also collected progress monitoring data aligned to the 8- to 12-week cycle to ensure student improvement and evaluate the appropriate support based on student needs. In terms of implementation, the team dedicated a single individual to oversee the initiative — this person was responsible for liaising with the tutoring company and directly coaching and supporting principals during implementation. Additionally, this individual used data in their support of principals to ensure that they continually improved the tutoring implementation and the support provided by the district. As a result, students who participated in tutoring as part of their Tier III support improved their scores on Star Reading assessments by 31.95 points, on average, compared to +18.61 for students who did not participate in tutoring. To ensure sustainability, the team in Grand Forks has built tutoring into their Title I budget. The schools demonstrating the highest level of need are all qualified for Title I, so this has resulted in a sustainable way to ensure ongoing funding for tutoring.

**SCORE:** During the 2022-2023 school year, a group of four districts in Tennessee (two large urban districts and two mid-size districts), in collaboration with the [State Collaborative On Reforming Education (SCORE)](https://www.scoreshare.org/), a non-profit research and advocacy organization based in Tennessee, and with support from [Accelerate](https://www.acceleratetn.org/), worked to consider how their high-dosage tutoring (HDT) supports should fit into their overall vision for early grades literacy academic support. While the guidance in Tennessee already encouraged districts to leverage their high-quality instructional materials in HDT settings, the districts began to: 1) consider a vision for instruction that would ground all of their early literacy supports in those materials, 2) adjust their master schedules to support more HDT, and 3) implement a pilot to increase the use of HQIM within their pre-existing tiered support structures. The districts implemented HQIM-aligned tutoring alongside their typical Response To Instruction & Intervention (RTI²) tiers, in which different “intervention materials" were used along with different assessments to monitor student progress. The [final report](https://www.scoreTN.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1708:final-report) showed differences in percentile growth between the beginning-of-year and end-of-year universal literacy screener assessments based on the support structure students...
experienced — either RTI² or HDT. Overall, results indicated that students in these districts who were furthest behind (those scoring between the 1st and 10th percentiles) experienced more growth when they spent time in HDT that leveraged HQIM aligned to core instruction, compared to those who experienced RTI² support that leveraged materials different from those used in core instruction. Students between the 11th and 40th percentiles also experienced more growth, on average, in an HDT structure that leveraged HQIM aligned to core instruction than when placed in core instruction alone.

Appendix

Input and/or feedback on this brief was provided by:

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- Estafania Rios, Rahway High School
- Jennifer Krajewski and Amanda Neitzel, Proven Tutoring
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- Matthew Barrow, Baltimore City Public Schools
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