State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP):

Coherent Improvement Strategies

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Introduction

IDEA 2004 requires states to implement the requirements and purposes of the Act and improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Within the Act, states must develop a State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP). Pennsylvania's plan is to systematically increase the graduation rate for students with disabilities. The focus is on the adoption and implementation of innovative evidence-based practices, otherwise referred to as Coherent Improvement Strategies.

SSIP Coherent Improvement Strategies:
Early Warning Systems

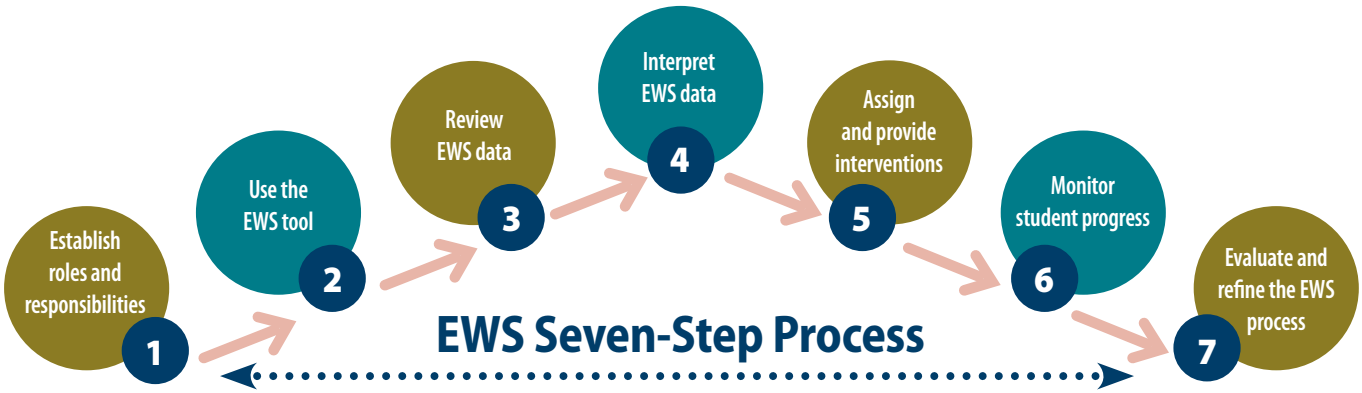
CAPS
Completion for All Pennsylvania Students

Strategy 1: Utilize data systems to identify, inform, monitor, and increase the graduation rate of students with disabilities.

An Early Warning System (EWS) represents a collaborative approach among educators, administrators, parents, families, and communities to using data effectively to keep students on the pathway to graduation (Bruce, Bridgeland, Fox, & Balfanz, 2011). A well implemented Early Warning System can help educators and others identify students at risk of dropping out and assign and monitor interventions to keep them on track for graduation (Frazelle, S. & Nagel, A., 2015).

The Philadelphia Education Fund, along with other research entities, sought the most highly predictive factors for dropping out of high school (Bruce, Bridgeland, Fox, & Balfanz, 2011). They identified three key factors—the ABCs—that were better predictors of student outcomes than demographics or test scores: Attendance, Behavior, and Course passing/performance (Pinkus, 2008, Neild, R. C., and R. Balfanz & L. Herzog, 2011).

Early Warning System is a seven-step process for school teams to use to identify students who are at risk for dropping out of high school, assign interventions, and monitor progress.



The **indicators used** to identify students at risk are:

Attendance
(engagement)

Behavior
(school code of conduct violations and state reportable offenses)

Course Performance
(grades in English/langauage arts and mathematics)

Common **challenges** include:

Difficulty importing data into the tool

Staff Turnover
(challenges getting new team members up to speed)

Limited staff time to fully implement the EWS process

Citation: REL Midwest, AIR, & IES (2017)

SSIP Coherent Improvement Strategies:
Multi-Tiered System of Supports Academic

CAPS
Completion for All Pennsylvania Students

Strategy 2: Implement increasingly intensive evidence-based methodologies toward improved academic outcomes.

Equitable Access to High Quality, Standards Aligned Core Instruction and Differentiated Content Support

Core Instruction

Early Warning System (EWS)
PVAAS
Extant Data

Screening

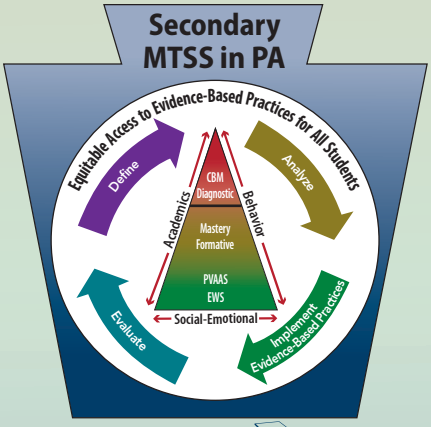
District, Building, Grade/Departmental and Individual Problem Solving Teams Continuously Collaborate Toward Enhanced Outcomes for All Students

Shared Ownership

Diagnostic
Mastery
Formative
Summative

Data-Based Decisions

Secondary MTSS in PA



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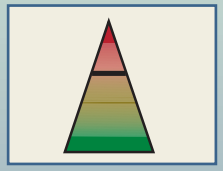
RTI

Response to Intervention (RTI) is an Assessment Process That Informs Instructional Intensification and Student Growth Within MTSS and an Approach Used for SLD Determination

Family Engagement

Schools and Families Work Collaboratively Toward Attainment of Positive, Strength Based Goals and Outcomes



2 Tiers

Academic, Behavior, and SEL EBPs
Mentoring
Attendance Strategies
Alternative Programming
Secondary Transition

Professional Learning

PLCs
Peer and Differentiated Coaching

For additional information, please visit www.pattan.net and access the Multi-Tiered System of Supports resource page.

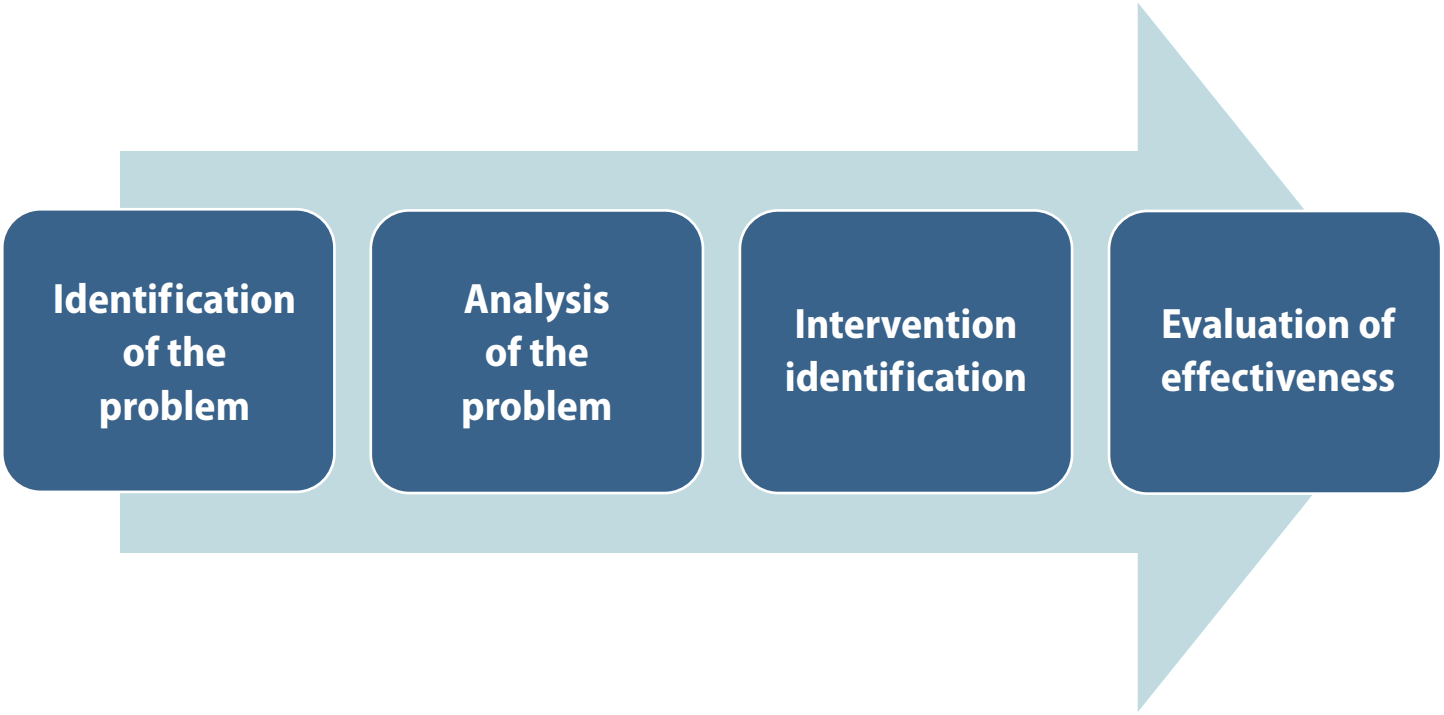
Strategy 3: Implement increasingly intensive evidence-based methodologies toward improved social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes.

The MTSS Behavior framework is an example of tiered support, defined through systematic assessments, preventive core instruction, and customized assessments and interventions for students with intensive needs. Integrating multi-tiered support systems in social, emotional, and behavioral functioning is called SWPBIS. The SWPBIS framework includes three tiers of assessment, instruction, and intervention based upon the identified needs of students in the school community. Tier 1, described by Sugai and Horner (2009), is assessment and instructional practices provided to all students. These assessments and procedures prevent or minimize learning barriers while promoting inclusive educational practices for all students. Students who do not act in response to the supports provided at the Tier 1 level, typically 15 to 30 percent of the school population, will require Tier 2 services layered upon Tier 1 preventive efforts. Finally, approximately 5 to 10 percent of the students who are nonresponsive to Tier 1 or Tier 2 level support are provided with additional concentrated interventions within a Tier 3 process. These interventions are student-centered and family-oriented.

The MTSS Behavior framework employs a problem-solving approach to build a continuum of support to foster the social-emotional and behavioral development of all students, including students identified with disabilities. The four-step process utilized includes the following:

1. Identification of the problem
2. Analysis of the problem
3. Intervention identification
4. Evaluation of effectiveness

(Robbie, K., Van Lone, J., Kern, L. & George, H.P., 2021).



Robbie, K., Van Lone, J., Kern, L., & George, H. P. (August 2021). *Using a PBIS framework: Working smarter, not harder in rural schools*. Center on PBIS, University of Oregon. www.pbis.org

Sugai, G., & Horner, R. H. (2009). Schoolwide positive behavior support. In W. Sailor, G. Sugai, G. Dunlap, and R. Horner (Eds.). *Handbook of positive behavior support* (pp. 307-326). Springer Science + Media.

Strategy 4: Promote the implementation of attendance strategies and alternative programming that will increase the likelihood of graduation.

Across the United States, more than 8 million students are experiencing chronic absenteeism, putting them at increased risk for poor academic outcomes (Attendance Works, 2018). Disengagement and school dropout are processes that unfold over time. By 6th grade, attendance emerges as a leading predictor of whether a student will complete high school (Attendance Works, 2018). Deciding to leave school prior to graduation does not need to be a student's only choice, nor does it need to be a final decision. Attendance strategies and alternative programming provide other pathways for students to stay in or return to school and graduate. Students leave school for any number of reasons, including individual concerns, family issues, or school-related and academic issues. Sometimes high school programs do not meet an individual's needs or work for them given their individual circumstances.

As with academics and behavior, schools can utilize a multi-tiered system of supports for attendance, including preventative practices, more personalized outreach, and intensive intervention (Attendance Works, 2018). Keeping a student on track for graduation is the goal. However, circumstances can arise that make attending school difficult, if not impossible. In these situations, schools that are able to offer attendance strategies and/or alternative programming to students are more likely to experience higher graduation rates. Attendance strategies and alternative programming may include, but is not limited to credit recovery, after school, night school, online schooling, and mentoring.

Attendance Strategies and Alternative Programming:

- School attendance
- School completion
- School reentry
- Course offerings (Phi Delta Kappan Poll, 2016)
- Alternative programs (Credit Recovery, night school, online schooling, mentoring) (Heppen, J. et al., 2016)
- Supportive services (Strong relationship between families and the community, structured mentoring interventions) (Guryan, J. et al., 2021; Sheldon, S. B., 2007)
- Cradle-to-career partnership that unites education, community, and business
- Wraparound education supports (After School, mental health, medical, dental services) (Phi Delta Kappan Poll, 2017)
- Cultural responsiveness
- Remote learning, hybrid schooling, brick and mortar

Strategy 5: Personalize the learning environment and instructional practices.

Secondary schools across the nation have been challenged to improve the academic achievement and relational (social/emotional) success of all students. Twenty-first century skills are associated with critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation. Students will also need to develop complex communication skills and the ability to collaborate effectively within the context of increasingly sophisticated technologies and rapid change.

Culturally Responsive Practices

Culturally responsive practices are embedded within all facets of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support. School completion for students from every background is of paramount importance, therefore instruction and interactions with students of various ethnicities, races, and linguistic levels require the establishment of strong relationships. Culturally responsive educational systems embrace cultural differences and seek to include, rather than exclude, differences.

> **"Every student should graduate from high school . . . regardless of their income, race, ethnicity, language background, or disability status."**
>
> (www.ed.gov, April 12, 2011)

Responsive systems:

- Enlist professionals with caring ethics to serve diverse students
- Support the use of curricula with ethnic and culturally diverse content with an asset-based approach
- Encourage the use of communication strategies that build on students' cultural identities
- Nurture the creation of school cultures that are concerned with deliberate and participatory educational practices

Moreover, culturally responsive educational systems create opportunities for teacher reflection, inquiry, and mutual support on issues related to cultural differences.

Working effectively with families from cultures that differ from one's own requires an understanding of one's beliefs and values as well as recognition that one's language, culture, and ethnicity influence interaction (Lynch & Hanson, 2011, p.37). Cross cultural competence is defined as the ability to think, feel, and act in ways that acknowledge, respect, and build upon ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity.

Strategy 6: Embrace a philosophy of partnership that empowers families and communities to become more meaningfully involved.

Building successful partnerships starts by raising awareness about the power of family and community involvement, taking action to cultivate involvement through specific programs and practices, and celebrating success as your school sees increased involvement and its impact. Below are descriptions of the six National Standards for Family-School Partnerships from the National PTA.

Standard 1: Welcoming All Families into the School Community

Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

Standard 2: Communicating Effectively

Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.

Standard 3: Supporting Student Success

Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

Standard 4: Speaking Up for Every Child

Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support their success.

Family Engagement

To ensure that every child reaches proficiency in core academic disciplines regardless of zip code, economic status, race, ethnic ity or disability, schools and districts need to consider the importance of family and community engagement. Research clearly points to a strong correlation between parent involve ment and student achievement (Epstein, 2005; Furger, 2006; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

When schools implement intentional and intensive family and community engagement strategies, there is a significant rise in student achievement scores (Redding, et al., 2004).

Family Engagement builds a culture of trust and respect by promoting equitable partnerships among schools, families, and communities to actively advance student achievement through shared commitment, decision making and responsibility.

Standard 5: Sharing Power

Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create policies, practices, and programs.

Standard 6: Collaborating With Community

Families and school staff collaborate with community members to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.

For additional information, please visit www.pattan.net

Strategy 7: Provide rigorous and relevant instruction to better engage students in learning and provide the skills needed to graduate and have positive post-school outcomes.

Secondary transition prepares youth for life after high school. In Pennsylvania, transition planning is required by Chapter 14 to be included in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) at age 14; however, planning can begin earlier if determined appropriate by the IEP team. Federal law requires that students have "appropriate, measurable post-secondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills."

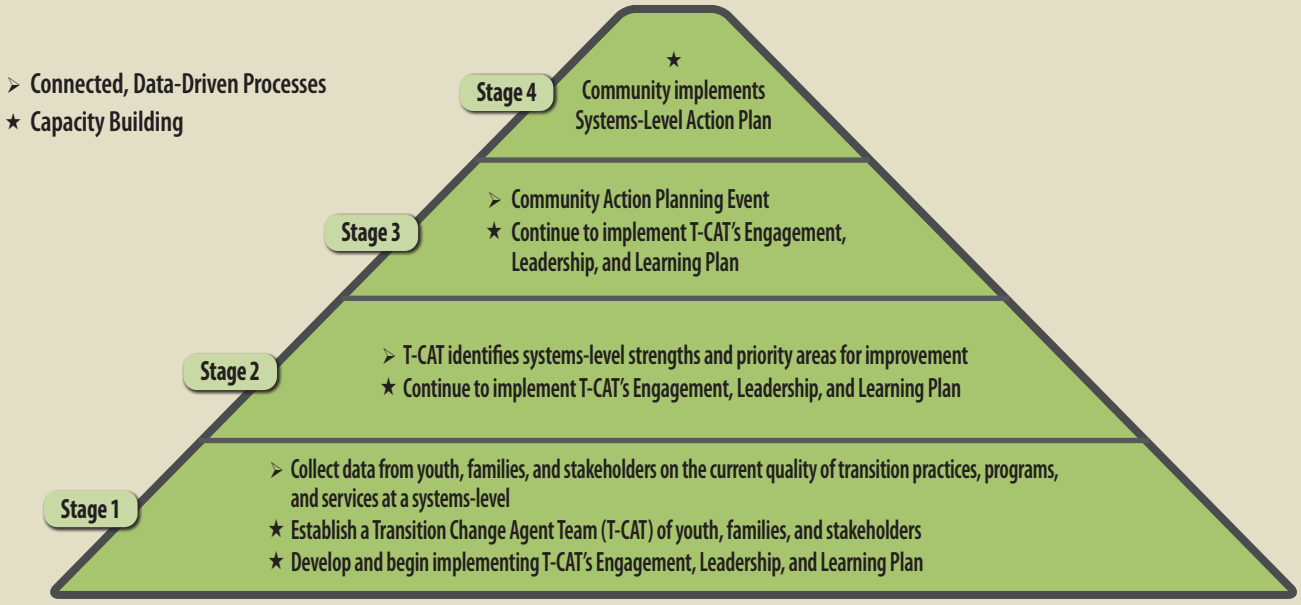
Secondary transition planning reflects a coordinated set of activities, experiences, and services to help students stay engaged in school, graduate with a high school diploma, and prepare for the transition to the adult world.

When planning, the important questions should be asked, including:

- What are the student's current levels of educational performance based on the student's long-range goals for adult life?
- What activities and strategies should be included in the IEP to help the student move toward the realization of his/her post-secondary goals?
- What community linkages, services, supports, or programs will the student need to achieve the desired post-school goals and ensure success as he/she enters the adult world?

Transition Discoveries, Pennsylvania's selected model for systemic transition programming change, exists through the belief that young people with disabilities, their families, and the stakeholders who support them make up a powerful network of relationships, knowledge, and experience for what's working in transition. Transition Discoveries involves implementing a multi-stage community-driven action planning model that empowers young people, families, and stakeholders to co-create improvements to current transition programs.

The 4 Stages of Transition Discoveries Implementation



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Josh Shapiro, Governor

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