

# Development of the Michigan Department of Education Multi-Tiered System of Supports Practice Profile

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## Introduction

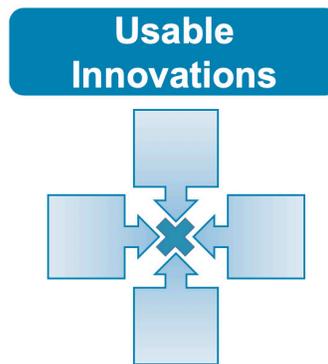
To achieve significant impact, research-based frameworks and evidence-based practices need to be well specified and matched to the needs of the student population within the school.

Specifically, frameworks and their practices are more likely to be implemented effectively and achieve intended outcomes when:

- a. stakeholders (teachers, students, and others) find the practices acceptable to meet locally identified needs;
- b. the school has the capacity to support sustained training, coaching, and data needs with district support;
- c. the practices are clearly defined to help teachers and others know what they should be doing; and
- d. adaptations to the practices are systematically made based on data (Metz, 2016).

When practices lack specification, it is challenging for teachers, staff, and leaders to figure out the “what” of the practices they should be using so that impediments to use of the practice can be identified and removed (Hall & Hord, 2006).

To ensure that frameworks and practices are usable, four criteria need to be met (Fixsen et al., 2013; Flay et al., 2005):



1. Clear description of underlying philosophy, principals, theory of change, and intended beneficiaries (i.e., who is the practice for);
2. Identification of the essential components or active ingredients to achieve intended outcomes;
3. Operationalization of the essential components or active ingredients to achieve intended outcomes; and
4. A measure of its use as intended (i.e., fidelity).

Practice profiles are a tool used to ensure practices are well-defined so that they can be taught, learned, used, and measured. Practice profiles define the practice through a rigorous stakeholder engagement process and are informed by the research literature. The practice profile can then be used to develop effective professional learning, coaching strategies, and measures of implementation.

The purpose of this brief is to highlight how the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) engaged systematically and purposefully in the practice profile development process to clearly define Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

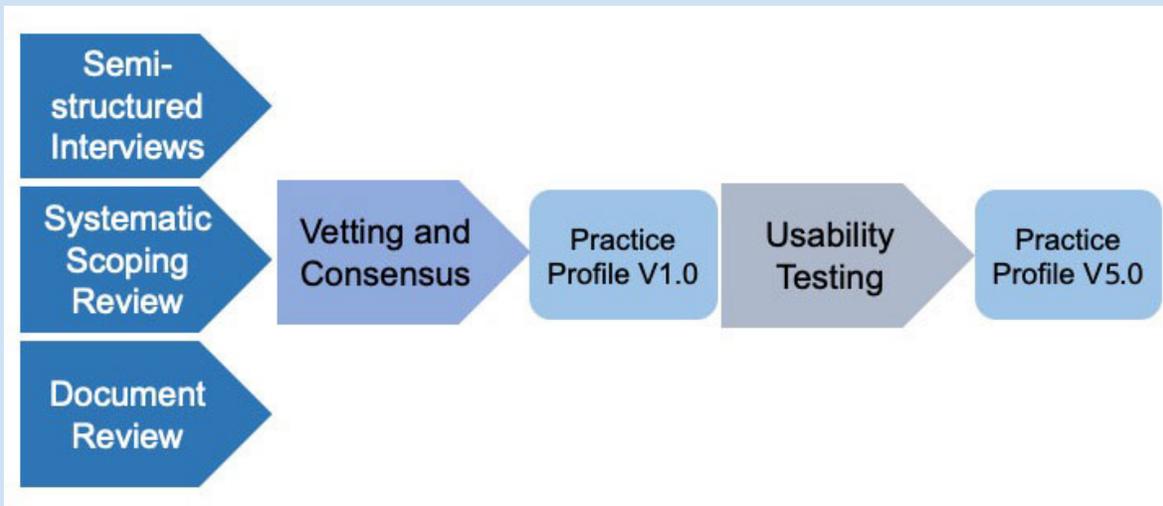
Over the years, the MDE had released guidance and provided a variety of supports for MTSS, a research-based framework that attends to the academic and behavioral needs of students. However, a common philosophy and consistency in the definition and critical features of MTSS were missing. Given a new statewide strategic plan and state legislation that provided funding to districts and schools in support of MTSS implementation, MDE leadership prioritized MTSS in a systemic change effort by the department. One of the first steps in this effort was to create a practice profile that clearly defined the philosophy and essential components of MTSS.

## Practice Profile Development Process

MDE leaders (i.e., state transformation specialists and senior staff) formed and developed a team with diverse perspectives and roles (state, regional, district, schools, institutes of higher education) to create the practice profile. The MTSS Practice Profile Design Team was provided an introduction to their purpose and received training and coaching support on the practice profile development process and methodology by the state's technical assistance partner, the State Implementation & Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices Center (SISEP).

Over an eight-month time period, the team then followed a multi-step iterative process to identify the principles, essential functions, and operational definitions (Metz, 2016). The iterative process included: 1) document review; 2) literature review; 3) semi-structured interviews; and 4) vetting and consensus process.

### Evidence-based Process for Operationalizing



Methodology graphic demonstrating the iterative process including: 1) document review; 2) literature review; 3) semi-structured interviews; and 4) vetting and consensus process.

## Research & Document Review

A scoping research review was conducted to map the key concepts of MTSS research and available evidence (Arkey & O'Malley, 2005). The team articulated the following parameters for the scoping review using the State of Michigan Library and the SISEP TA Center's university library resources. Using the articles identified, the team was then assigned articles to review and charted key information related to the guiding principles, definition, and essential components of MTSS.

<b>Scoping Research Review</b>	<b>Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)</b>	
<b>RESEARCH QUESTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What key core components (i.e., essential functions) are identified in published studies related to an integrated MTSS model?</li> <li>• How are these core components (i.e., essential functions) operationalized?</li> <li>• How have these functions been tested? What were the results?</li> <li>• Are these core components in alignment with the core components identified thus far in the document review?</li> </ul>	
<b>SEARCH TERMS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-Tiered System of Supports</li> <li>• Response to Intervention</li> <li>• Response to Instruction</li> </ul>	
<b>DATABASES SEARCHED</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychinfo</li> <li>• Education Full Text</li> <li>• ERIC – Education Resources Information Center</li> <li>• Academic Search Premier</li> </ul>	
<b>SEARCH OR INCLUSION CRITERIA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research that is less than 10 years old</li> <li>• Integrated models of MTSS (e.g., spans across multiple content areas including literacy, behavior, math)</li> <li>• Research applicable to general and special education</li> </ul>	
<b>STUDY SELECTIONS</b>	UNC Search Results	11 articles
	MI Library Search Results	12 articles
	Overlap between UNC & MI Library	2 articles
	Total articles reviewed following screening	21 articles

## Document Review

For the document review, the team scanned current state legislation and policy, guidance from different state department of education divisions and offices (n = 18 documents), fellow states' MTSS guidance and documentation (n = 6 documents), and other national publications such as policy briefs and white papers (n = 6). Results from the document review were charted and key information regarding the guiding principles, definitions, and essential components of MTSS was summarized.

During analysis of the scoping research and document review results, the team was facilitated through consensus building processes to develop a common philosophy and guiding principles, and identify the essential functions of MTSS. Key discussion points were the inclusion of guiding principles and essential components that represented the [whole child](#) (cognitive, social, emotional, behavioral, and physical), were applicable to early childhood and K-12 education, and represented a growth mindset. The team also discussed for which level of the system (i.e., district, school, and classroom) the activities supporting the essential components within the practice profile should be written. A determination was made to write the practice profile for the district level with the specific audience being a district leadership/implementation team. This decision was based on two factors: 1) there are school-level fidelity measures available that aligned with the identified essential components; and 2) there was a need to clearly describe the role of the district team in MTSS implementation.

With the philosophy, guiding principles, and [essential components](#) identified, the team then drafted definitions and key activities of the essential components. Informed by research, the team drafted the first essential component's definition and key activities together, then worked in pairs and small groups to draft the remaining essential components' definitions and key activities.

As the team reviewed each other's work, key questions were used to guide the review including:

1. Is this an essential function for practitioners?
2. If no, should it be included within another essential function or removed?
3. If yes, are the core activities measurable and observable?
4. What changes or additions are recommended?
5. What additional literature should be reviewed?
6. Are more perspectives needed?

### Five Essential Components



### Semi-Structured Interviews – Focus Groups

To ensure diverse stakeholder perspectives and feedback were used to inform the development of the MDE MTSS Practice Profile, a series of focus groups were conducted. Specially, MDE MTSS Practice Profile Design Team members facilitated 19 focus groups with a total of 81 participants. Stakeholders were inclusive of national researchers and subject matter experts in MTSS, state department of education staff from various offices who monitor and/or support districts and schools in their use of MTSS, intermediate

school district (regional education agency) staff who support districts and schools in their use of MTSS, district leaders, school principals, early childhood educators, teachers (pre-k, elementary, middle, and high school), community partners, parents of students, instructional coaches, school psychologists, curriculum directors, special education coordinators, and interventionists.

An **interview protocol** was developed and identified facilitators, recorders, and note takers from the MTSS Practice Profile Design Team received training for engaging in their respective roles. Focus group data was recorded, coded, and summarized in key themes. The MTSS Practice Profile Design Team members then reviewed the themes and notes from the focus groups to inform changes needed to the philosophy, guiding principles, definitions, and key activities for the essential components.

### Example Focus Group Questions:

- From your perspective, what are the underlying values that should guide MTSS practices?
- How would you describe the core activities of MTSS in your work?
- Given the philosophy and values you have discussed, do these core activities adequately capture how you bring those to life?
- If not, how would you describe the essential components of MTSS?

## Using the Practice Profile

Following the review and approval by MDE leadership, the MDE put the practice profile into action. Specifically, MDE MTSS leadership used the MTSS Practice Profile to:

- Develop professional learning scope, sequence, and content
- Select a schoolwide fidelity measure for assessing the use of MTSS as intended by school leadership teams
- Influence revisions to guidance for monitoring the use of state aid funds for support of MTSS implementation
- Inform the evaluation of MTSS implementation at state, regional, district, and school levels

All of the above and other implementation supports were put into action and tested with two Intermediate School Districts and a small sample of their member school districts (see [Transformation Zone](#)).

The MTSS Practice Profile Design Team continued to meet quarterly over the next two years to review feedback from use of the profile and make changes/edits as needed using identified decision rules, including keeping in alignment with research and evidence of the essential components' activities (see [current MDE MTSS Practice Profile Version 5.0](#)).



## Implications and Conclusion

Throughout the process of developing the practice profile, several key learnings were identified for both the MDE and the SISEP TA Center. These included the following:

- Helped develop trust in and practice the iterative nature of the work
- Highlighted the need to invest in the long-term aspect of the work; it was not cheap and fast but did result in a quality product
- Highlighted the need for access to peer-reviewed research and partnership with university researchers
- Developed capacity among MDE staff in various components of the methodology (scoping research reviews, conducting focus groups, etc.)
- Highlighted the importance of cross-office inclusion of MTSS knowledge-building and communication with the MDE

In summary, the MDE MTSS Practice Profile clearly defines standards and expectations for what MTSS looks like in practice and provides guidance for implementation of MTSS as indicated in Michigan's state law. It describes specifically what actions educators and leaders take when using an MTSS framework as intended. By using the research-based development process, efforts were taken to ensure that the MTSS framework is teachable, learnable, doable, and usable, which, in turn, supported the creation of readiness and buy-in as educators saw their voice in the practice profile. By establishing a consistent definition of MTSS to be used by leaders and educators from district to district and region to region within the state, the stage was set for increasing capacity to support MTSS by facilitating the development of necessary implementation supports such as professional learning, coaching, and implementation measures. Finally, the MDE MTSS Practice Profile has been recognized, referenced, and used by other State Departments of Education nationally.

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# Acknowledgements

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The sciences of implementation and improvement continuously improve from the efforts of partners in the field who share their improvement stories and data, the successes to replicate, and the barriers to solve. NIRN and SISEP wish to acknowledge and extend heartfelt gratitude to the educators in the state described in this paper, who continue to participate and commit to the work of deep systemic change in their state education system, all in service of supporting the continuous improvement of educators' capacity to improve student outcomes and close long-standing disparity.

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