



School Social Work Association of America Resolution Statement

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

Summary

The School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA) strongly supports the development and implementation of integrated multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) for all students. This continuum is based on a Response to Intervention (RtI) approach to address students' academic, social, emotional and behavioral needs.

“RtI is an approach that is highly consistent with social work values and school social work practice standards and should be viewed as an organizing framework for school social work practice” (Clark & Alvarez, 2010, pg. xv). The SSWAA National School Social Work model supports the MTSS process by encouraging school social workers to:

- (1) Provide evidence-based education, behavior, and mental health services
- (2) Promote a school climate and culture conducive to student learning and teaching excellence
- (3) Maximize access to school-based and community-based resources.

Framework of Response to Intervention

RtI is a framework for organizing evidenced based practices in a systematic process for the purpose of determining what interventions enable learning. RtI is structured to address academic and behavioral needs by differentiating supports and interventions using student performance data (Clark and Alvarez, 2010). The four essential components of RtI include: (1) a school-wide, multi-level instructional and behavioral system for preventing school failure, (2) screening of all students to determine who is at risk for poor learning outcomes, (3) progress monitoring during instruction, and (4) data-based decision making for instruction, movement within the multi-level system, and disability identification in accordance with state requirements (National Center on Response to Intervention, March 2010).

The core principles of RtI include the following:

- Effectively teach all children
- Intervene early
- Use a multi-tier model of service delivery
- Make decisions using a problem-solving method within a multi-tier model
- Intervene/instruct using research-based and scientifically validated methods to the extent available
- Monitor student progress to inform instruction
- Use data to make decisions
- Utilize assessment for the purpose of screening, diagnostics, and progress monitoring (National Association of State Directors of Special Education 2005, p. 19-20).

These eight principles, with focus on fidelity and cultural responsiveness, are consistent with the strengths-based approach of school social work practice. Based on the School Social Work National Practice Model, school social work roles and responsibilities are directly relevant to RtI principles. School Social Work Professional Standards, as recommended by National Association of Social Workers, also reflect the RtI framework. For example, one of the Guiding Principles of the Standards is to utilize “Multitier Interventions...relating to prevention and intervention” (NASW, 2012, p. 4). Other areas of relevance include:

Standard 3 Assessment

- School social workers shall conduct assessments of individuals, families, and systems/organizations (namely classroom, school, neighborhood, district, and state) with the goal of improving student social, emotional, behavioral and academic outcomes.

Standard 4 Intervention

- School social workers shall understand and use evidence-informed practices in their interventions.

Standard 5 Decision Making and Practice Evaluation

- School social workers shall use data to guide service delivery and to evaluate their practice regularly to improve and expand services.

Standard 10 Interdisciplinary Leadership and Collaboration

- School social workers shall provide leadership in developing a positive school climate and work collaboratively with school administration, school personnel, family members, and community professionals as appropriate to increase accessibility and effectiveness of services.

These standards set an expectation that school social workers will utilize an ecological perspective and systems theory when conducting functional assessments to enhance the understanding of barriers to student success and that generate data that are useful in designing and implementing interventions (Clark & Alvarez, 2010).

Role of School Social Workers

Through these practices, school social workers promote a multi-tiered system of support that provides early identification of needs in four domains: academic, social, emotional, and behavioral. School social workers should conduct system-level assessments and utilize data to design differential interventions and supports that are able to be directly measured, monitored, and evaluated for their effectiveness (Clark & Alvarez, 2010). School social workers must collaborate with teachers and parents to provide appropriate interventions and navigate school-based and community services to enable students to experience success in the four domains. By employing the MTSS process, school social workers have the opportunity to closely align school social work practices with instruction to impact academic achievement.

The following are strategies that school social workers should consider incorporating into their practice within the RtI or MTSS structure:

- Actively participate as a member of the school leadership team and help to design the MTSS process at your school.

- Assist in the development of the universal (Tier 1) implementation plan for both the academic and behavioral areas.
- Assess services/programs currently provided by the school social worker and identify opportunities for expansion of school-wide or group-based supports for students.
- Provide targeted (Tier 2) services for students needing extra support by utilizing evidence-based individual and small group modalities along with classroom-based interventions.
- Provide more intensive (Tier 3) services than those at the universal (Tier 1) or targeted (Tier 2) level for students needing individualized treatment, which may include support from agency partners or a special education referral (Johnson, 2013).

Beliefs

SSWAA believes that evidence supports the comprehensive implementation of an MTSS approach to school social work services and that it is an essential means to achieve improved academic and behavioral outcomes for all students.

References

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