

Considerations for Tiered Systems of Support in a Virtual or Hybrid Setting



During this unprecedented global pandemic due to COVID-19, it is important to be cognizant of the multifaceted stressors placed on students, families, teachers and schools that overlap and sometimes exacerbate one another, including environmental, financial, emotional, teaching and learning stressors:

- For some families, home is not conducive to multiple family members working and learning at the same time.
- The pandemic has caused financial stress for many families (e.g., furloughed, loss of job, excessive hours as an essential employee, choosing to adjust work hours to accommodate childcare or to support children's online learning).
- There is emotional strain from trying to juggle family and work demands, thus creating feelings of not being successful in either area. There are also concerns about health – in particular, sickness and death of family members and in the community; these may trigger some existing mental health conditions or create new ones.
- Caregivers are being asked to engage in students' learning in different ways. Often, throughout the day, caregivers support students with logging onto the computer and accessing the different technology platforms and materials, checking in on assignment completion, engaging in dialogue with teachers about academic content and often providing supplemental instruction to their children. Many caregivers are also educators.

- Teachers must constantly adjust to the operational protocols (virtual or hybrid, changing schedules) and adapt their instruction to integrate technology for varied learning styles (kinesthetic, auditory, visual and linguistic); likewise, students must be flexible to receive instruction in ways that differ from traditional school.

As a result, student engagement in and attendance at school may be adversely impacted because the students' *context* (environments, relationships and experiences) exists within families, communities and schools. When considering an implementation of tiered supports in a virtual or hybrid setting, these two data points are essential. The [Minnesota Department of Education](#) defines student engagement as "the commitment to learning, sense of belonging, and willingness to participate in learning activities that are associated with positive student outcomes."

The "[60 Minutes](#)" episode that aired on Nov. 22, 2020, focused on the impact of the pandemic on student enrollment. "Going back to school this year has been a lesson on patience. Since the surge of COVID cases this fall, many cities, including New York, Detroit and Philadelphia, have suspended or postponed their plans to hold in-person classes ... hundreds of thousands of students did not enroll. They're not logging in or coming in."

Schools and teachers must set and communicate expectations to both students and families regarding student engagement and attendance and then vigorously track and monitor the data. Schools must also decide when additional interventions and Tier 2 supports may be needed. If you have not yet done so, consider having your Leadership and Student Support teams create a plan to track and monitor attendance and engagement that is adapted to the virtual environment. Please click [here](#) to see some distance learning guidance and suggestions on academic engagement and attendance for tiered systems of supports from The Minnesota Department of Education.

[Pikes Peak Online School](#) in Westminster, Colorado, focuses on engagement and attendance right from the start of the school year. They have an Engagement Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) team, and they use both an engagement and a truancy tracker. Head of School Nicole Tiley shared, "We need to get students engaged before we focus on academics."

Additional Information

Below are links to additional information on tiered supports implementation during this time of virtual and hybrid teaching and learning:

[Perspective | 6 Considerations for MTSS in a Pandemic](#) by Kayce Smith, October 26, 2020

[Tier 2 and 3 Virtual Learning](#) by Hanover Research, May 2020

[COVID-19 FAQ: Guiding Questions for Educators Providing Multi-Tiered Systems of Support \(MTSS\) Intervention](#) by Texas Education Association, April 7, 2020

[11 Interventions Your MTSS Team Can Adapt for Distance Learning](#) by Nick Woolf

[How Can MTSS Work in a Remote Environment?](#) By Martin Yan, June 23, 2020