Implementation of MTSS at Sante Fe Trail Middle School

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**Introduction**

For this paper, I spent some time talking with Sarah Essex, one of three school counselors at Sante Fe Trail Middle School in Olathe, Kansas. Sarah explained the process of MTSS interventions in their building and offered quite a bit of information surrounding their process. In terms of social and emotional development with the students of Sante Fe Trail, Sarah explained that MTSS looks different at the secondary level than it does at the elementary level. There are more students with increasingly more complex situations that need a more intricate level of care, academically, socially, emotionally, even physically. As we look at the three tiers of intervention, Sarah explained that, in their building, their MTSS work is highly data driven with a variety of intervention techniques.

**Tier One Intervention**

 Tier one interventions really boil down to universal instruction. Tier one interventions are applied to all students and make up approximately 90% of the student population. At Sante Fe Trail, each week, teachers meet as a team and discuss student behaviors, concerns, successes, etc. These meetings are to evaluate all students. After they discuss and name the students that are struggling, they first try to switch up situational circumstances before any further intervention. This often looks like switching up a seating chart or a student’s specific schedule. This could also look like a one-on-one meeting with a student or a parent. Sarah explained that they utilize a system called Mastery Connect as a tier one intervention which is a competency-based learning platform that helps teachers identify levels of understanding, target students for intervention, and inform their way of instruction.

**Tier Two Intervention**

Tier two interventions at Sante Fe Trail are largely implemented by teachers that come up with their own interventions and sometimes utilize the counselor’s expertise. The teachers at Sante Fe Trail utilize reinforcement surveys to identify what motivates and helps specific students. Sometimes this comes down to having lunch with a teacher, time with the therapy dog, or getting a pop at the end of the school day. Sarah explained that she keeps a behavior chart in a Google Form and really prioritizes making things data driven. Students in tier two are often the ones that meet one on one with the counselor 1-2x/week (sometimes more), are put in groups, or are analyzed by the school psychologist. The data that is used to put students in this tier is data that is collected from the behavior chart(s), but also data that comes from grades and academic testing. In terms of parent involvement from students who fall into tier two, Sarah explained that parents are on board 99% of the time. Most parents just want what’s best for their kids and they will take any help they can get. Sarah said that most parents are incredibly appreciative of the help and trust the direction that school leadership takes things. Staff, on the other hand, gets incredibly frustrated with the MTSS process. Sarah said that her teachers will often explain that they have been teaching long enough to know who needs what help, and they find the data collection piece of MTSS to be a waste of time.

**Tier Three Intervention**

 Tier three intervention comes from monthly meetings with the Student Intervention Team (SIT) at Sante Fe Trail. This team is made up of teachers, administrators, and SPED teachers that implement one on one intervention techniques, reinforcement surveys, referrals to SPED, etc. Along these same lines, tier three interventions almost always include a social worker and/or school psychologist that work to target specific students and families to get them the help and support that they need. The data that is used to identify students in tier three is almost solely limited to MAP assessment data. With this data, the Student Intervention Team compares scores and exposes gaps in content areas that, in turn, works to identify students who need further intervention. Like parents of tier two students, parents of tier three students are almost always incredibly grateful for any help they can get. Sante Fe Trail is approximately 40% non-English speaking. Because of this, a lot of the parents are overwhelmed and don’t even know where to begin in getting their child the help they need. The resources and interventions provided by the school are incredibly helpful for them. Sarah said the word “relief” is the best way to describe the parent’s disposition toward MTSS in helping their kids.

**Interventionists**

As I mentioned in the introduction of this paper, Sante Fe Trail has their students divided into “teams.” This means that each grade has two to three teams. Students are in the same classes with the same teachers as the other students on their “team.” This not only gives the teachers the ability to get to know their students better (because they see a lower number of students more often), but it also gives the teachers a chance to identify the students who may need higher levels of care (academic, social, emotional, physical, etc.). With this, Sarah explained that as the teachers are the main interventionists in terms of academics, the district has behavioral intervention specialists that come in for students with concerns more related to disruptive behavior.

**Conclusion**

Sarah explained through the entirety of this interview that the quality of MTSS implementation is largely dependent on the quality of your school psychologist. Because a full 90 days of evaluation is needed, it can be incredibly difficult to gather accurate and full sets of data if your school psychologist is not behind it. Sarah explained that it is also incredibly difficult if your teachers are not on board with the data collection process and/or the process of intervention implementation. At the secondary level, the students are responsible for keeping track of the form that needs to be filled out by a variety of teachers, and often, putting a 13-year-old in charge of this doesn’t end well. All this being said, Sarah explained that she is incredibly thankful for the MTSS process, as she has seen it be wildly beneficial for so many students in getting them the support that they need to succeed.