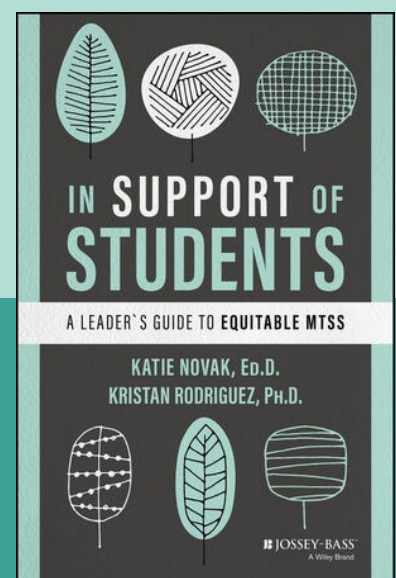# IN SUPPORT OF STUDENTS

A Leader's Guide to Equitable MTSS

BOOK CLUB GUIDE

Katie Novak and Kristan Rodriguez

This book is for educational leaders who believe that we can create more inclusive and equitable systems, that change is possible, and that our learners, especially those who have been excluded, minoritized, marginalized, and have had to be resilient, deserve so much more.

We are so excited to join you in this journey.

– Katie and Kristan

USING THIS GUIDE

As you facilitate your book club, remember to incorporate the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). For example, consider offering opportunities for synchronous or asynchronous sessions, in person and/or virtual sessions, and options for participants to respond to prompts using multiple means of action and expression. Consider setting up a free course in a platform like Moodle or Canvas so you can utilize discussion boards where participants can post reflections in written form, audio, and video. Alternatively, you can use social media platforms like Twitter to host a book club chat or create a Facebook group. You may want to offer a blended model - offering options for small groups to meet in person and/or to participate virtually.

TIPS FOR FACILITATING A SUCCESSFUL BOOK CLUB

- Have a designated point person for each book club option (i.e, the social media maven, the check-in person for in-person sessions, and the course manager if setting up a virtual course). This person can check in with the teams to monitor progress, provide feedback, and offer motivation to keep on reading!
- Regardless of the pathways the participants select, consider offering synchronous Zoom sessions periodically where participants can share their thoughts, questions, and "aha!" moments as they read the book.
- When participants are posting online, be sure to keep the conversation going - ask questions, share resources, make comments, and provide feedback.

BOOK CLUB MODULES

This book club guide is broken into modules which correspond to each chapter in the book. You can determine the pace of getting through the modules based on the preferences of the group. In each module, participants read the associated chapter, revisit the pause and reflect questions and activities throughout the chapter, review the discussion questions at the end of each chapter, then share their experience with the group.

OPTIONS FOR PARTICIPATING

- Host an online book club via Canvas, Moodle, Facebook Groups, or another free tool.
- Connect to your group via social media. Tag each other in inspiring posts, share notes and thoughts while you are reading (Katie and Kristan love to see what you are doing too! Tag them).
- Offer opportunities for your teams to meet live via tools like Zoom, Google Hangouts, or in small groups.

INTRODUCTION

As tempting as it may be, starting with application won't result in the outcomes you are hoping for. You may have begun to invest in necessary changes, but your district will not realize full implementation and complex change until all the systems are in place.

As you read this book, consider pondering the questions provided for reflection by jotting down your thoughts, writing a blog, or sharing thoughts on social. You can also ask your own questions about your practices. Think of this book as your interactive guide to transform your systems. Thank you for taking this journey with us. Our students, our staff, and our communities are absolutely worth our efforts!

CHAPTER 1

PLANNING FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

> We can't get "frozen" in our action plan if we aren't making the desired impact on the students we serve.

PAUSE & REFLECT

Select one of the "Pause and Reflect" prompts to discuss and/or work through with a peer or within a small group.

1. As you reflect on the stages of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model, consider staff members who are in each stage. Where are you currently as it relates to creating an inclusive and equitable MTSS?
2. Reflect on the six core components of improvement and determine your organization's alignment with the core principles. Note any areas of strength as well as areas that will be important to address during the strategic planning process. In short, how will you improve your improvement process?
3. Use the template to create a theory of action about MTSS in your school or district: If we build a comprehensive MTSS then [this will be the change in practice], so [these are the outcomes we anticipate].

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. We discussed the unfreeze-change-refreeze model. Reflect on your current system and identify mindsets, skill sets, and/or practices where colleagues are "frozen." How have you addressed these "frozen" elements in your practice?
2. The Concerns-Based Adoption Model requires us to support educators as they ask, "What happens if we do this?" and "What happens if we do not?" Take time and prepare your answers to those questions as it relates to equitable MTSS.
3. What is the value of shifting MTSS into a model that centers on the student experience and equity?
4. In implementation science, the first stage is Exploration, where stakeholders identify the need for change. Take a moment and consider what you believe needs to change in your system to meet the needs of all learners.
5. Improvement science requires that we respond to multiple data forms. In your own practice, what data do you examine and triangulate consistently to determine the effectiveness of current practices?

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING MTSS

> *It is critical to ensure that all learners have access to Tier 1 instruction that challenges them, supports them, and affirms their identity while ensuring supplemental supports are also available when students need them.*

PAUSE & REFLECT

Select one of the "Pause and Reflect" prompts to discuss and/or work through with a peer or small group.

1. Does your school or district distinguish between Tier 2A and 2B? What may be the impact of supporting colleagues to differentiate between the two?
2. In your school or district, is there a clear understanding of the differences between MTSS and RTI? If not, how can you begin to support educators and other stakeholders in recognizing the differences?
3. As you consider the practices in your school or district, are academic, behavioral, and social and emotional needs equally important? If so, how do you know? If not, what adaptive changes may be necessary to ensure that all stakeholders are focused on the whole child and student experience in school?

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. How did the discussion of MTSS in this chapter relate to your current understanding of MTSS in your school or district?
2. Does your school or district embrace "Supplement, not supplant," or are students pulled from Tier 1 instruction to get additional support? What barriers prevent students from receiving Tier 1 instruction with their peers if this is the case?
3. How is MTSS different from RTI? Why is it important to support educators in understanding similarities and differences?
4. How did the basketball analogy help you to see UDL as a unifying framework that brings all your improvement efforts together?

CHAPTER 3

THE POWER OF INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

> *Not only do students need access to classrooms that are engaging and universally designed, but they need those classrooms to celebrate their identity.*

PAUSE & REFLECT

Select one of the "Pause and Reflect" prompts to discuss and/or work through with a peer or within a small group.

1. Did you ascribe to the theory of learning styles? If so, notice the cognitive dissonance you may be experiencing as you "unfreeze."
2. As you consider the barriers that prevent all students from accessing Tier 1 inclusive and equitable instruction with their peers, would you categorize them as barriers to mindset, skill set, or system barriers?
3. How could you and your team use the UDL Look-for Tool in Table A.1 in Appendix A to reflect on, calibrate, and/or improve inclusive instruction so all students can access Tier 1 classrooms with their peers?

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. At the beginning of the chapter, we asked you to consider what you know about UDL, differentiated instruction and deeper learning and to pose questions about the frameworks. Return to those questions to reflect on if your understanding of the frameworks has evolved.
2. UDL requires schools and systems to focus on beliefs, skills, and systems work. In your experience, which areas are the most challenging to address?
3. What systemic shifts can you make to create conditions, so that deeper learning occurs in all settings?
4. What specific indicators can we monitor in our system to ensure that UDL and deeper learning occurs in all settings?

CHAPTER 4

BUILDING YOUR TEAM AND CRAFTING A VISION

> *If we are going to create a system that represents the lived experiences of our students and their families, we have to commit to elevating historically marginalized voices in the planning and design process.*

PAUSE & REFLECT

Select one of the "Pause and Reflect" prompts to discuss and/or work through with a peer or within a small group.

1. If you do not have a core MTSS team and an MTSS advisory team yet, consider why it would be important to create teams that can monitor the progress of your MTSS implementation while also having an advisory group to provide feedback and elevate the perspectives of diverse stakeholders.

2. Do you have a district vision? If you are not sure, explore your district web page or reach out to the superintendent. If you have one, reflect on the vision as it relates to MTSS, inclusive practice, UDL, and deeper learning. If you do not have a vision yet, what would be a next step toward working with your community to create one to guide your strategic work moving forward?

ACTIVITY

To reflect on the cultural responsiveness of your team, review and consider the following questions (Farmer, Hauk, and Neumann, 2005). As you work with your team, grapple with courageous conversations about the identities of all members and access to power and shared responsibility in MTSS work.

- Does your team validate the life-worlds, identities, and needs of all members?
- Does your team explicitly recognize the value and discussion of how cultural and personal identities mediate the design of curriculum, instruction, and assessments?
- Does your team support the development of awareness among members in knowledge, skills, and value sets associated with access to power?

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. What plans do you have to make sure that your MTSS advisory team is both inclusive and diverse with representative stakeholders throughout the district community?

2. Why is it critical to create team norms that address time, listening, confidentiality, decision-making, participation, and expectations?

3. How will you create and share your vision for MTSS and inclusive practice?

CHAPTER 5

KICKING OFF THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS

> *There is so much to do. It is so overwhelming that we feel maybe it's just easier to wait until there is a better time to start. That is a trap. Don't do it. Now is the time to start.*

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. How close are we to our vision, based on our current systems?
2. How can the initiatives review, document review, and asset-mapping process inform our understanding of where we presently stand within a tiered system of support?
3. How might we capitalize on our existing assets as you work toward our vision?
4. What data and systems do you anticipate need to be shifted based on your inventory of existing practices?

ACTIVITY

Select one of the activities to discuss and/or work through with a peer or within a small group. What systemic shifts can you make to create conditions, so that deeper learning occurs in all settings?

1. Review Table 5.2 as a checklist. Consider which of the documents you have already and which you would need to collect to facilitate a comprehensive document review to drive an MTSS needs assessment. The following considerations may be helpful:
   - Who will review the documents? Will the core MTSS review all the documents or divide them among small groups?
   - How will you share the document review process with the MTSS advisory group and other district groups for feedback?
   - How will this document review process help you to better understand district strengths and needs as it relates to building a comprehensive MTSS?
2. Has your district or school facilitated an asset-mapping process to guide the MTSS strategy?
   - If so, review the asset map through the lens of the questions in the previous section.
   - If you have not yet completed an asset-mapping process, share the process with your team and note its importance for future strategic planning.

CHAPTER 6

DATA ANALYSIS TO PREPARE FOR MTSS

> *As a leader, you may feel as though there is a strong culture of data, but staff and families may feel differently.*

PAUSE & REFLECT

Select at least one of the "Pause and Reflect" prompts to discuss and/or work through with a peer or within a small group

1. Reflect on your current beliefs about data and how data is used in your school or district to drive improvement efforts. What is one word you would use to sum up your personal beliefs about data? Your district data culture?
2. As you reflect on the data summary, what do you believe are the school/district priorities?
3. As a team, you will want to determine what systems you have in place to record and track the data metrics you have chosen.
   a. Where will you record the data and how will you share it?
   b. What systems (such as your existing student information system) do you have to house this data? Is it robust enough? If not, what next steps are necessary?

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. How would you describe your current data culture on your team and districtwide? How do you know?
2. Assessment maps are critical to driving continuous improvement. As you consider your suite of assessments, what are the strengths, and where are potential gaps?
3. How does your district currently make decisions about student support based on data? Do you have a data decision flowchart or data tree to support this work? If so, how could the development of one help to support educators with their decision-making?
4. What would you need to change in your school or district to have a robust data system inclusive of a strong data culture, evidence-based assessments, educators who are proficient at using data to drive instruction, time to analyze data, and adequate resources to address areas of need?

CHAPTER 7

CONDUCTING THE SELF-ASSESSMENT

> *We must examine our current systems to move closer to a vision of deeper learning for all students.*

PAUSE & REFLECT

- What rating would you provide for your instructional vision as it relates to what you have learned about MTSS, deeper learning and UDL?
    - ☐ (0) Not yet in place
    - ☐ (1) Partially in place
    - ☐ (2) Mostly in place
    - ☐ (3) Fully in place
- As you consider the instructional design in your school or district, what strengths and areas of need have you identified? Consider each of the components and reflect on how you would rate your curricular materials, equitable practices, pedagogy, assessments, and learning environments as they relate to the development of an inclusive and equitable MTSS.
    - ☐ (0) Not yet in place
    - ☐ (1) Partially in place
    - ☐ (2) Mostly in place
    - ☐ (3) Fully in place
- As you consider the tiered supports in your school or district, what strengths and areas of need have you identified? Consider each of the indicators and reflect on how you would rate your tiered systems of support, data-driven practices, and student access to resources as they relate to the development of an inclusive and equitable MTSS.
    - ☐ (0) Not yet in place
    - ☐ (1) Partially in place
    - ☐ (2) Mostly in place
    - ☐ (3) Fully in place

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. How has reviewing the self-assessment resources in this chapter changed your understanding of MTSS?
2. Consider your current process for completing a needs assessment as it relates to MTSS. What are the strengths of your current process? What will you improve in future strategic cycles?
3. How would this self-assessment process help to build a shared understanding of the strengths and areas in need of improvement in your school or district as it relates to MTSS?
4. Once you complete the self-assessment process, how will you share a draft of the results with all stakeholders for review and feedback?

CHAPTER 8

ROOT-CAUSE ANALYSIS

> *Sometimes we have to look a little deeper to figure out why something has occurred.*

PAUSE & REFLECT

Take a moment to reflect on the integration of previous steps in this process and your root-cause analysis. Note how this process brings together results from the needs assessment which included the document review and data analysis as well as the self-assessment to determine potential root causes. Why is it important that the team commit to each step in this process instead of jumping into setting strategic goals?

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. Have you completed a root-cause analysis in your previous strategic cycles? Compare your past practices with the methodology outlined in this chapter.
2. How will you share your key findings and potential root causes with all stakeholders to increase transparency and buy-in?
3. Why is verifying root causes critical before drafting strategic goals and an action plan for MTSS and district improvement?
4. What strategies could you use to validate your root causes?

CHAPTER 9

PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

> *Each district will have its own unique strengths, challenges, and plans and thus the organization of the district strategic and the corresponding language will be unique to each district.*

PAUSE & REFLECT

Select at least one of the "Pause and Reflect" prompts to discuss and/or work through with a peer or within a small group.

1. As you consider your MTSS team and your work to create a strategic plan, do you have the conditions in Table 9.1 present? If so, how do you know? If any of the conditions are missing, how will you go about collaborating with stakeholders to recognize areas of need and continue to build the necessary conditions for success?
2. If you have a district strategy, review it through the lens of the previous checklist. Does your plan have all the necessary components for a robust MTSS? What is missing that will be critical to incorporate into future strategic cycles?
3. Has your team developed a logic model to drive strategic improvement? If not, consider why your team may have skipped this step.Why it is critical to focus on logic modeling, especially as it relates to differentiating outputs and outcomes to measure your impact on all learners?

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. How does your process of planning a district strategy and annual improvement plans align to the recommendations in this chapter?
2. What are the benefits of engaging in logic models as you create district improvement plans that align to your overall district strategy?
3. What are the challenges associated with logic modeling and how can you address them through proactive and strategic planning?
4. How would regularly reporting status updates in your action plan create transparency and improve communication in your school/district?

CHAPTER 10

IMPLEMENTING SYSTEMS

> When we lean into fidelity and integrity, we provide a recipe for success.

PAUSE & REFLECT

1. What do you see as the two to three big decisions leaders made to move MTSS implementation from theory to practice in the case study at the end of the chapter?
2. Is there anything in the team's approach that is similar to something happening in your district?
3. What would you take from the team's approach and bring back to your district team? Why?

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. What does it look like to successfully lead an inclusive and equitable school district? What measurements are you using in your district to monitor your progress?
2. As a team, you will determine what systems you have in place to record and track the data metrics you have chosen for district/school improvement. Where will you record the data and how will you share it? What systems (such as your existing student information system) do you have to house this data? Is it robust enough? If not, what next steps are necessary?
3. As you reflect on your journey in this text, answer the following question: What is equitable MTSS and how does it support all students?

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