



Student Support Team for Georgia Educators

Effective Solutions Matched to Student Needs

GA's Tiered System of Supports for Students

Carole Carr

Teachers and administrators are taking a proactive approach to student learning with Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students. Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students is expected to become a primary guide for schools to improve student learning outcomes and work collectively to create more positive school cultures and environments. The essential components of Georgia's framework have been adopted from the nationally-vetted Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) including: Screening, Progress Monitoring, Multi-Level Prevention System, and Data-Based Decision Making. Georgia added Infrastructure as a fifth component to ensure schools can develop a systemic, preventive educational system that can easily be personalized for every child in every classroom in the state.

"Our hope is that educators will seamlessly pay close attention to the social, emotional and behavior needs of children as they do academic needs," said Program Manager, Karen Suddeth. "Changing our approach to teaching children will create a paradigm shift in Georgia by moving from identifying and reacting to student failures to preventing student failures..."

(*GA's TSSS* continued, p.2)

Practitioner Perceptions of Barriers to MTSS

Implementation in Georgia
Amanda Sailors

This year, with funding from a School Personnel Development Grant (SPDG), the Georgia Department of Education (DOE) is embarking on the initial phases to roll out a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework in ten school districts that were chosen through a competitive process (Georgia Department of Education, 2018). For a number of years, SSTAGE has provided professional learning opportunities to districts interested in building a strong MTSS framework, the most recent of which was the 2nd Annual SSTAGE RTI/MTSS Summit in Macon featuring national speaker Dr. Mark Shinn.

Prior to beginning his keynote presentation titled, "MTSS and RTI: 10 Big Ideas that Everyone Needs to Know for Implementation Success," Dr. Shinn polled the audience regarding barriers to implementation of MTSS frameworks. In this article, we seek to summarize these barriers to implementation of MTSS, as perceived by practitioners in the field. This data can inform those responsible for the implementation of MTSS at the school and district level, but most importantly can aid those responsible for the rollout of MTSS at the state level to understand perceived barriers in Georgia.
(*MTSS* continued, p.4)

2018 Debbie Rondem Award for Outstanding Leadership Winner Named

Wallace Blackstock

In 2011, the SSTAGE Board of Directors created the Debbie Rondem Award for Outstanding Leadership which was named in honor of the first recipient of the award. Each year Georgia educational leaders are nominated for this award. One educator per year receives the award, and that individual is recognized at a SSTAGE event. The qualifications of the nominee include:

- Must be currently employed in an administrative leadership position at the central office or school level and have responsibilities related to RTI and/or SST and/or MTSS.
- Must possess a record of educational leadership that is considered exemplary.
- Must exhibit leadership characteristics that are considered a positive role model to, and inspiration for, others.

On September 12, 2018, during the annual STAGE Fall Conference, Dr. Donna Major, the Coordinator of School Improvement in Walton County, was named as the recipient of the 2018 Debbie Rondem Award for Outstanding Leadership. A review of Dr. Major's accomplishments represents why naming her as the awardee was a unanimous decision.

- The development of structures and practices for implementing RTI, data based decision making and evidence-based school improvement.

(*Awards* Continued p. 2)

GAEL Jim Puckett Award, page 3
Promising Practices Conference, p. 5

2019 Promising Practices Conference
January 16, 2019

(Award, continued from p. 1)

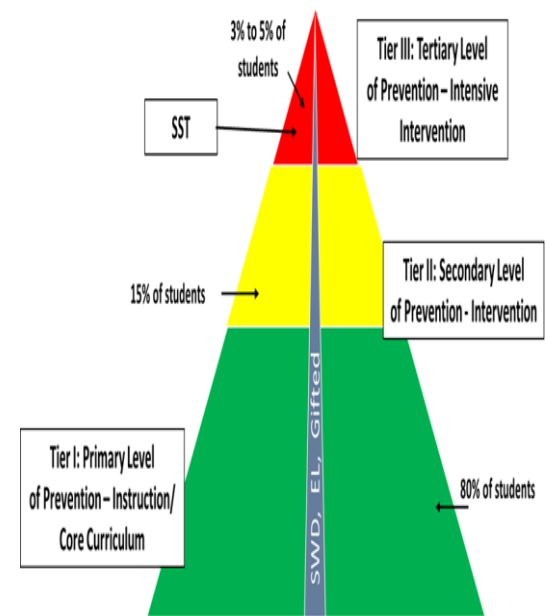
- Trainer/Coach for fidelity in the RTI framework at the state, system and school levels.
- Vital support in the federal programs department in her district and diligently worked with a designated FOCUS school which was successfully removed from FOCUS status within the 3 year window.
- She has guided the system-wide implementation of:
 - AIMS Web assessment at Tiers 1, 2 and 3
 - Use of System 44 and Read 180 intervention with significant noted gains
 - Development of a countywide intervention resource bank, and
 - Collaborated and designed the district's electronic documentation program for RTI/SST and 504 (iLamp)
- Advocate and system level support for the GaDOE statewide PBIS project implementation.
- In past years she has worked in several Georgia school districts
 - leading improvements in reducing disproportionality
 - guiding psychology departments
 - developing the RTI academic and behavioral support frameworks
- She has been an active member of several organizations in education which focus efforts on school improvement, school psychology, EL/ESOL, Federal programs: GASP, GAEL, and SSTAGE.

Dr. Major has been invited to deliver professional learning numerous times for the above mentioned associations. Across her career she has demonstrated she is always willing to collaborate with other counties and share proven practices and her knowledge with others. Dr. Major is a well-respected educator who continues to make a difference in the lives of so many of Georgia's students. She possess the expert skills for leading: Educational Leadership, Staff Development, Public Speaking, Teaching, Special Education Leadership, K-12, Interventions, Curriculum Development & Design, Program Development, Learning Disabilities, Educational Technology, RTI, SST, Educational Psychology, and Community Outreach. Alongside her active career in educations, Donna is one of the longest serving SSTAGE members, having served as SSTAGE Past President (2011-2012) and is currently the Co-Chair of Research and Best Practices Committee. SSTAGE is proud to announce the 2018 winner for the Debbie Rondem Award for Outstanding Leadership is the Coordinator of School Improvement in Walton County, Dr. Donna Major.

(GA's TSSS continued from p.1)

...and supporting students with informed decisions based on data," Suddeth added.

Until now, Georgia was the only state to have a four-tiered pyramid. Now, Georgia operates within a three-tiered, multi-level prevention system. Students will receive services at all levels, depending on their needs. When all components are implemented, results from research indicate strengthened Tier I instruction with 80% of students responding to core curriculum.



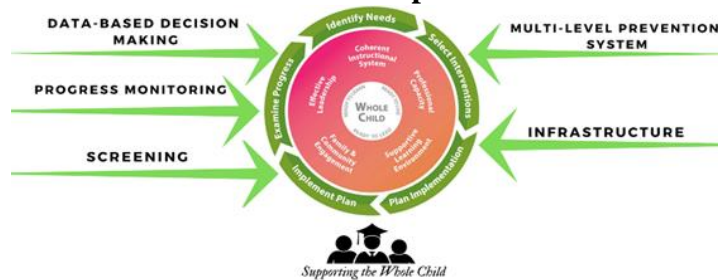
The MTSS model is aligned with Georgia's Systems of Continuous Improvement. MTSS supports existing district, state, and federal initiatives and connects systems to improve student academic and behavior outcomes. Schools and districts across the state will use the framework to develop common language and choose best teaching practices to move forward as One Team, with One Plan and One Delivery model. Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students will advance the work of the Systems of Continuous Improvement and will focus on supporting the whole child through personalized, high-leverage practices and evidence-based interventions.

"One key ingredient RTI lacked is maximizing learning outcomes for all students and not something we only do for students whose academic skills or behaviors are not meeting expectations" said Jody Drum, regional coach. "Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students embraces continuous school improvement, collaboration and prevention that will extend beyond the classroom and transform partnerships between educators, parents and the community," said Drum. (GA's TSSS continued p.3)

Creating a Brighter Future
for Georgia Educators
and Students

(GA's TSSS continued from p.2)

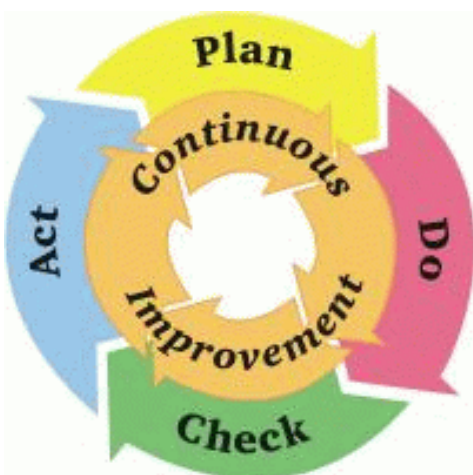
Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students Essential Components



Ten school districts have committed to implementing the framework including: City Schools of Decatur, Clarke County School District, DeKalb County School District, Dodge County School District, Glynn County School System, Houston County Schools, Marietta City Schools, Muscogee County School District, Paulding County School District, and Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools.

Cohort One partner schools and districts will receive professional learning and guidance to develop practices that involve all the essential components of the framework, implementation of the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, and processes of administering and analyzing student assessments to make data-based decisions. The comprehensive model will help educators select appropriate interventions, plan for areas of improvement, monitor progress, and continuously evaluate student supports and systems in place.

Georgia's Tiered System of Supports for Students is funded through a five-year grant from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). We value our partnership with SSTAGE and all the effort its members have dedicated to move this work forward. The state implementation team is focused on providing professional development and giving everyone a voice in the future of Georgia's children. To get involved, visit <http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/TieredSystemofSupports.aspx>.



GAEL Puckett Outstanding Educator Award Named Wallace Blackstock

Each year, GAEL provides members the opportunity to nominate fellow members for the Outstanding Educator Award. Winners are recognized at the Summer GAEL Conference to be held this year July 10-13 with an award plaque and check for \$200. The honor goes to individuals who personify the leadership qualities modeled by GAEL's third executive director Dr. Jim Puckett.

Nomination Criteria include:

- Current membership in GAEL and in one or more GAEL affiliates for a minimum of three years. (Current Presidents of GAEL and GAEL affiliates are not eligible during their term of office.)
- An employee for at least one full year in the school district from which he/she is nominated.
- Possess a record of service for the profession of educational leadership that is considered exemplary.
- Exhibit leadership characteristics that are considered a positive role model for others.

SSTAGE is proud to have Dr. Amanda Sailors as our recipient of the Puckett Outstanding Educator Award. Dr. Sailors has served as the Madison County School System Student Services Director and RTI-Assessment Coordinator for the past six years. She has played a role in Madison County Schools with that district being named as the 2013 SSTAGE Star Award Winner for Promising Practices at the District Level. Within their school system, Comer Elementary School was the 2016 Star Award Winner at the Elementary Level, and Madison County High School was the 2017 Star Award Winner at the High School Level. Dr. Sailors has served as the President for SSTAGE during the 2016-2017 school year. SSTAGE has benefitted from her expertise and knowledge. She continues to serve as co-chair for the SSTAGE Communications Committee.

In her Career, Dr. Sailors has served as

- Secondary Language Arts Teacher
- Administrative Leadership in two school systems
- Central Office System Level Leadership

Dr. Sailors has recently accepted the Principal Position at Comer Elementary School, Madison County Schools, following the retirement of Comer's principal, Christine Register. Dr. Amanda Sailors is a visionary who is able put into practice at all levels the evidence based and time proven principles of which SSTAGE has been providing training and support for nearly 12 years:

- An Effective, Systematic Problem Solving Process
- A Coordinated Assessment and Progress Monitoring Process
- A coordinated System of Instructional and Behavioral Supports and Programs
- Job-Embedded Professional Learning and Ongoing Teacher Support
- A systematic Plan with Specified Practices for Parent/Family Communication and Involvement

It is for these reasons SSTAGE has selected Dr. Amanda Sailors as our organization's 2018 recipient for the Puckett Outstanding Educator Award.

(*MTSS* continued from p.1)

Forty-nine of the attendees at the 2nd Annual SSTAGE RTI/MTSS Summit responded to Dr. Shinn’s questionnaire; these participants represent approximately half of the summit attendees. While these participants cannot be considered a random sample of practitioners in Georgia, as they have self-selected into a group of summit attendees who are interested in building stronger MTSS frameworks, they do represent a wide-range of districts in Georgia. Further, they are participants who represent the K-12 spectrum, and are, essentially, a purposive sample, as they are participants likely to have first-hand knowledge of the barriers to the implementation of MTSS in Georgia school systems.

When asked about which grade spans are the “biggest pain points” for practitioners, the participants gave the following responses.

Grade Span	Percent of Participants Choosing as a “Pain Point”
K-2	40.8%
3-5	34.7%
6-8	36.7%
9-12	57.1%

A higher percentage of participants noted that implementation of the MTSS framework at the high school level is problematic. This perception of practitioners is supported by the extant literature on MTSS implementation (Sanger et al., 2012; Graves et al., 2011; Sansosti, Gos, & Noltemeyer, 2011; Sansosti, Noltemeyer, & Goss, 2010). What is interesting in the perception data from practitioners in Georgia is the extent to which implementation in K-2 is a perceived barrier. Nearly 41% of the participants noted that K-2 is a “pain point” for implementation of MTSS. This perception is somewhat counterintuitive, as implementation of tiered systems of support in the early grades, especially related to early reading, is heavily supported in research (Mellard, Frey, & Woods, 2012).

When asked what the “biggest challenge” is that they face when implementing MTSS, survey participants noted a range of factors. Chief among these were not having enough resources and/or research-based interventions (32.7%); not having enough people to implement (24.5%); and the need for professional development related to “where to start” (16.3%). Another 14% noted barriers related to monitoring implementation, and 12% noted not having enough time for implementation. These perceived barriers are across the K-12 spectrum, and the only notable difference was that the largest percentage to report barriers related to monitoring implementation were in the 6-8 grade span.

The final question on the brief survey was related to an “actionable item” that participants could take away from the summit. This question was more open-ended in nature, and the data is more qualitative. Participants noted the idea that implementation of MTSS should not “be a process focused on SPED placement.” In addition, Dr. Shinn’s recommendation for less assessment and testing resonated with several participants, and the following actionable items were mentioned: “examine instructional time and limit assessment time”; “use EOY [end of year] data to plan for BOY [beginning of year] interventions”; “emphasis on decreased testing...progress monitoring at Tier 2 every 4 weeks.” Several actionable items related to focusing on Tier 1 and strengthening core instruction, as well as providing for “intense intervention” early for those students who need it serve as strong discussion components for proactive teaming and planning.

(*MTSS* continued p.5)

The SSTAGE Rubric for SST, RTI/MTSS

Characteristics of Effective Practice for SST, RTI/MTSS and the Pyramid of Interventions	Circle the number that represents the degree to which the school or system demonstrate each characteristic:			
	1 - Not Addressed	2 - Emergent	3 - Operational	4 - Fully Operational
1. Effective, systematic problem solving process at each tier with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined responsibilities and roles of members • Alignment, communication & connectedness (with/to other teams) • Data driving the team’s decision making to inform instruction 	1	2	3	4
2. A coordinated system of assessment and progress monitoring (to include universal screening, decision-making rules, data collection and analysis, measures of fidelity, and intervention effectiveness).	1	2	3	4
3. A coordinated system of instructional/behavioral supports and programs with resources allocated (to include scheduling, research-based materials and practices, and staffing).	1	2	3	4
4. Job-embedded professional learning and ongoing teacher support that addresses relevant areas essential to effective implementation including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coaching support • Follow-up to ensure implementation of new skills • Case study examples 	1	2	3	4
5. A systematic plan with specified practices for parent/family communication and involvement . Sample practices such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence in developing parent/family pyramids • Parent/Family brochures • Parent/Family training modules 	1	2	3	4

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AMANDA SAILORS: SSTAGE
COMMUNICATIONS CO-CHAIR

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

(*MTSS* continued from p.4)

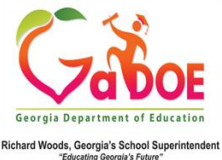
As Georgia moves toward state-wide roll out of an MTSS framework, this data related to practitioner perceptions of barriers to implementation is valuable. The implementation of any policy or reform in education is situated and contingent on the local context—the infrastructure and capacity of those responsible for implementing it (Fullan, 2007; Honig, 2006; McLaughlin, 2006; McLaughlin, 1990). At this time in Georgia, even practitioners who self-select into a group that is interested in the implementation of MTSS and desirous of additional professional learning anticipate barriers to implementation, especially related to resources, personnel, professional learning, ability to monitor implementation, and time. While implementation at the high school level is perceived to be the most problematic, over 1/3 of the participants noted barriers at all levels of the K-12 spectrum. The efforts of the Georgia Department of Education to roll out MTSS should include components that address these perceived barriers.

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Save the Date



The SSTAGE Fall Conference

Featuring

Pat Quinn, The RTI Guy

When

September 10, 2019

Where

The Anderson Conference Center Macon, GA