

Right Services 1

Now that we've identified the students who need support, we need to figure out what interventions we're going to put into place! However, we have to start first by figuring out what exactly your school and district have already in terms of processes and resources. I've found that a lot of places have a formal way things are supposed to happen and an informal way that they tend to actually happen. The formal process generally involves a lot of meetings and paperwork and planning—an SST referral form might be filled out with multiple questions leading to a discussion weeks later while a plan is put into place after a month. Or, a special education evaluation might need to happen, waiting 45 days before a meeting occurs. The informal method is done when a teacher just happens to be in the right hallway at the right time and says that magic phrase: "By the way, since I have you, I'm worried about _____. Could you check in on them?" While we never can completely replace the 'informal method' (nor do we want to—multiple pathways to the same result is going to be a theme of this article) the more there's a gameplan that everyone signs onto, the more staff can all pull in the same direction to work smarter, not harder. This doesn't mean defaulting into something overly complicated that requires months of waiting; instead we need to make the formal way quick, automatic, and easy. Otherwise, the informal way will be the only way, resulting in students having arbitrary access to services based on inconsistent criteria with little to no documentation. In turn, that results in inequitable services with fuzzy goals.

Before you start figuring out how we have students access services, we have to talk about what services your school offers. As an SST, let's talk about resource mapping. The most basic steps are to figure out what you have. Support services are rooted in your people, so resource mapping has to start the same. Let's tackle the basic questions:

- Who are your people?
 - How many support staff are there?
 - At what level/school?
 - What are their caseloads? (Keep this specific, but brief! It's not a competition.)
 - Do any have advanced training/specialization/interests?

As always, I love a [good excel sheet](#) for keeping track of this information. While you might have all this information in your school handbook, or written down somewhere, or might think it's just obvious, the goal here is to make everything clear for everyone—there's at least one person who doesn't know all this. (You might even learn something new about your colleagues!)

The next step is to do the exact same thing, except for programming. By programs, I mean specialized services that target a specific population and go beyond the usual 30 minutes of counseling on an IEP. For example, you may have a bridge program for students returning back from psychiatric hospitalization or social skills groups aimed at students. Here's a list of questions to start:

- What are your programs?
 - What programs already exist?

- Which students do these programs serve? (e.g. special education students with an identified emotional disability)
- Which staff are attached to them?
- How are they evaluated? (How do you know if they're working?)

Surprise! Another [excel sheet](#).

Now that we know what we have in terms of staffing and programming, it's time to ask a tough question—do we want to keep on doing all that we're doing? A key idea is to 'prune before we grow.'¹ That means we can't create new programs or resources without thinking about what we're going to stop doing. This is important to figure out in order to help staff keep all their work manageable. Another wonderful phrase I've come across: "Strategic Abandonment." Here's [a great tool](#) to help guide discussion on whether programs are working or not.

Now that we know what people and what programs we have, we're in a great position to start talking about how students get access to those resources. Let's talk about the within-school referral process. (For now, we're focusing just on internal services and processes, although referral to outside sources is of course important.)

Here are the questions to start that discussion:

- What's your referral process?
 - If a student woke up one day and wanted help, how could they get it?
 - If a parent wanted to seek out support for their child, how could they get it?
 - If a teacher thinks a student needs support, how would they get it?
 - If a student gets in disciplinary trouble, how do you decide if counseling is needed?

The answer to all of these can't just be to email the school counselor! It's too many emails for anyone to manage and it doesn't clarify which services might be appropriate for each student/family. The faster we can match students to services with the least amount of time spent on emails and meetings, the better position we're going to be in.

We also have to think about having multiple methods to reach services. Assuming your school has implemented the proactive data solutions and universal mental health screening we talked about last time, that's one way in. But not everyone is going to feel comfortable walking into a counselor's office or even sending an email—we have to have multiple pathways to allow for the maximum amount of outreach. In doing so, we dramatically decrease barriers, which means more students get the help they need.

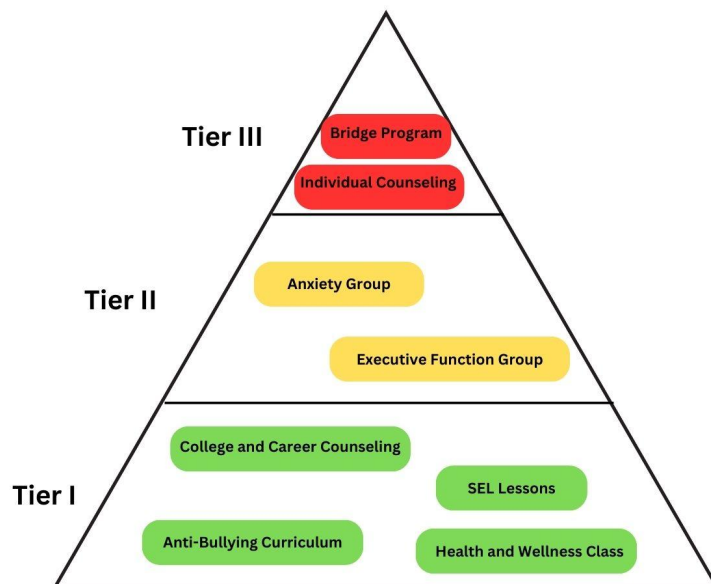
Here's an [example referral process](#), starting with the very basics. You might notice that emailing the counselor is still the first step—while it's ok to keep it there as a start, I'd recommend trying to think deeper about this. There are a lot more questions to ask around this that need to be

¹ I read that somewhere and loved the phrase, but can't remember quite where. Whoever coined it, it's genius!

discussed at a local level by the SST. For example, how do you provide access for families to reach out about their child who doesn't speak English? How is this information sorted so everyone knows what issues should go to which person? How do you make sure that emergencies are picked up immediately so a student with safety concerns isn't missed for a few days? SAMHSA has a great resource on this [here](#).

Now that we know how students access services, the programs, and the people, we can start talking about putting it all together. Thankfully, there's already a name for this—"Multi-Tiered Systems of Support" or [MTSS](#). A lot of MTSS resources can be very helpful, but let's start by placing our programs and people in each Tier of the pyramid, as shown below.

I'm guessing if you're in a high school, your pyramid might look something like this:



I've left special education services off at the moment because as essential to map as they are, MTSS is a general education system. That does not mean special education kids cannot access these services, of course!

Now we have our roadmap. We know what we have available and what staff member commitments are, so we can make realistic steps forward. Hopefully through this process, your team has discovered a few things—maybe you have a lot of services at one tier, but a gap in another. Or you might realize that you've been seeing a lot of students individually for the same thing and could form a group. Maybe you've even realized an unmet need that your school should really look into developing. With all your resources mapped out, you can now make informed decisions as a team on where to direct your energy, whether it's reforming the programming you already offer or developing new interventions.

Next on our to-do list is to check in on what evidence-based practices we're using to make sure that we are having the maximum impact and that the right students are truly connected to the right services. I will also discuss two mindsets in providing services that can enhance school based practices.

Additional Resources

Can't get enough resource mapping? Looking for an expanded version that goes through things step by step?

- Check out [this guide from the SHAPE system](#) on resource mapping and needs assessment.
- Want to think about possible gaps in your services? Here's a [Gap Analysis Worksheet](#) to get you started.