As educators work to implement the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states and school districts will be working with increased focus on school climate, social behavioral health, school safety and the impact of an integrated whole child approach on academic outcomes. In many districts and schools, educators are faced with the challenge of having to implement, sustain, and evaluate several different innovations, initiatives, programs or practices at the same time. In many districts, various approaches to promote social-emotional competence (e.g., PBIS, mental health, bullying & violence prevention, restorative practices, and trauma-informed care to name a few) are being concurrently implemented and/or new ones are being adopted without recognition of the potential for redundancy, misalignment, ineffective implementation, and/or cost (funding and effort). In some instances, new or existing initiatives may actually be in conflict with each other philosophically, creating confusion and dissonance among leaders and practitioners.

Due to the complexity of implementing several initiatives at once or adopting new ones in the context of existing practices, the implementation systems of a district or school must be organized in a manner that is highly strategic, efficient, relevant, and effective. Ensuring sustainability and efficiency requires heightened attention on knowing what is being implemented across the system and the effective alignment and coordination of the systems that support the implementation including leadership teams, evaluation structures and professional development. Often districts have more programs or initiatives or practices than can be implemented well (Domitrovich et al., 2010; Sugai, & Horner, 2006) without a formal process to guide decisions about selecting new initiatives or abandoning existing programs. McIntosh et al., (2013) has reported one of the primary variables impeding sustained implementation of effective practices is the introduction of new initiatives that either (a) compete with resources needed for sustained implementation or (b) contradict existing initiatives.

In the absence of a clear system-wide response to (for example) students' social-emotional competence needs, a district cannot ensure that it's initiatives, programs and practices, are adequately aligned, prioritized, and integrated. Implementing various initiatives in silos can strain the limited resources of any district, resulting in less than acceptable levels of fidelity and impact for each initiative. Therefore, district and school leaders need to assess existing and potential (social-emotional and behavioral) efforts carefully to ensure investments in professional development and instructional resources have a high likelihood of achieving desired outcomes.

To guide an outcome-driven view for integrating initiatives, programs, or practices across the school and district levels, it is important to start with the end-in-mind: high fidelity implementation and effective student outcomes. Classrooms are the primary context where students should perceive a seamless system of supports as educators braid or merge several different evidence-based practices within the learning

environment. Therefore it is essential that district level teams work side by side with school level staff members to ensure a manageable number of evidence-based practices are used and matched to student need with consideration of the larger school community. In this context, informed decisions regarding what to integrate (target), how much to integrate (interdependence), and for what purpose (goal) to integrate can occur at the school and district levels.

The purpose of this technical guide is to provide a structured alignment process with concrete steps to assist educational leaders as they:

- Examine current practices across educational units and systems (instruction, support, improvement, special education, mental health, justice);
- Consider the extent to which current practices are implemented with fidelity and produce meaningful academic and social/behavioral outcomes, and
- Establish support systems to select install and implement new practices.

Targeted users of this guide include state, district or school level leadership teams that have responsibilities for the selection and implementation of initiatives, programs or practices related to maximizing positive student behavior, as well as, academic outcomes. In some cases, formalizing the alignment process will be an additional function for the leadership team to consider as it works to improve the fidelity of program implementation, eliminate redundancy and streamline efficient implementation practices to improve school and student performance. The alignment process builds on implementation science (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005) by focusing on both the evidence of the initiative, program, or practice as well as the implementation processes and is organized around the core features of the Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016).

Using Multi-Tiered System of Support to Organize the Alignment Process

MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support) is a decision-making framework guiding selection and implementation of best practices for improving academic and behavioral outcomes. Through this framework, leadership teams across all implementation levels (state, district, and school) use core implementation elements to improve the learning environment for all students. A continuum of tiers is used to ensure additional supports are in place for students who may require more targeted or intensive approach.

The MTSS framework has six core defining features (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016):

1. Team based leadership and coordination
2. Evaluation of implementation fidelity
3. Continuum of evidence-based practices
4. Continuous data-based progress monitoring and decision-making
5. Comprehensive universal screening
6. On-going professional development including coaching with local content expertise

States and school districts have used the MTSS framework to re-allocate resources, re-purpose staff and develop other protocols across organizational levels. MTSS helps promote a new efficient way of working and can serve as the conceptual "umbrella" providing the general process for conducting system-wide alignment and integration.

The Alignment Process

The general process of establishing and conducting a system-wide alignment and integration process is summarized in the Alignment Self-Assessment Action Planning Tool (Appendix A), which includes guiding questions for each step as described below. The process is outlined in two sections. Section I focuses on the assessment of current initiatives and Section II focuses on the process for adding new initiatives. The Alignment Worksheet (Appendix B) can be used to guide teams through the analysis and decision-making as they complete the alignment of targeted initiatives. Section I of the Alignment Worksheet organizes the inventory of initiatives programs/practices to be aligned and Section II captures the analysis of core system features. Section III of the worksheet is used to document decisions and action items including timelines and those responsible for each action. Local context should guide decisions about what, if any, adjustments or additional steps may be needed to support planning activities and implementation procedures.

Section 1. Assessment of Current Initiatives

Step 1. Coordinate and lead alignment process with an executive level team.

An executive level team should be constituted with the authority for organizational change. They should have responsibility for determining professional development, policy, and data management processes. This team should have district organizational knowledge and budgetary authority for all initiatives being considered. In addition to resource allocation authority and oversight, representatives on the team should have detailed knowledge of the logic model and core practices of the initiatives to be aligned.

The executive level team should be tasked to specifically focus on (for example) social/emotional behavioral programs, practices or initiatives. Having key leaders with both the organizational and budgetary authority related to the specific initiatives is essential for effective alignment. It may involve expanding or re-purposing an existing team to ensure key leaders, as well as those responsible for guiding, coaching and evaluating all related initiatives, are assembled for the specific purpose of ensuring alignment. All phases of decision-making need to include these key personnel who have overall authority to make changes as well as those with expertise, leadership and direct implementation responsibilities for targeted initiatives.

The Alignment Process

Section I. Assessment of Current Initiatives

Coordinate and lead alignment process with an executive level team.

Define the valued outcome(s) to be achieved.

Develop an inventory of the related initiatives that are currently implemented across the district.

Has the team identified the core system features for initiatives targeted for alignment?

Analyze and make decisions for alignment of initiatives

Design the plan for effective alignment including implementation, evaluation and professional development.

Section II. Team adopts a formal

If collaborating with external consultants or agencies, Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) may be needed to clearly define roles and responsibilities for alignment and implementation. Having the right individuals on the team helps to maximize decision-making efficiency, build consensus for decisions, and ensure alignment of efforts within the district's strategic plan.

Step 2: Define the valued outcome(s) to be achieved

It is important to determine and define the valued outcomes for students and families to be accomplished (e.g., improving school climate, academic performance, attendance or decreasing bullying behavior). Be sure initiatives have common outcomes (e.g. improved social behavioral functioning) when attempting to select initiatives for alignment.

Clearly articulating the valued outcome(s) will assist the team in determining whether the existing initiative has been shown to achieve the desired measurable outcome through data collected by the district or school. Operationally defining the valued outcomes, so that they can be measured, will assist in examining data that has already been collected or help in deciding what should be collected to assess current status.

Step 3: Develop an inventory of the related initiatives currently being implemented across the district.

The first task of Step 3 is to develop a list of all related grants, initiatives, and practices across schools and community agencies with indication of population served. The department or division, as well as the individual, overseeing each initiative should be identified. For each initiative listed, the team should review and describe the research that supports each initiative. Next, the expected outcomes the district seeks to achieve should be indicated, followed by a discussion and summary of the documented results achieved by schools/district to date. Section I of the Alignment Worksheet (Appendix B) can be used to organize and document this information.

This inventory summarizes the team's discussion of all related initiatives currently implemented across the district (or state) with information about who has authority to make changes. This will assist in confirming that the executive level team charged with the alignment process has all the relevant members, including representation of those involved in leading the implementation of the various initiatives. At this stage of the process, it is also important for the team to discuss the evidence of effectiveness of each initiative, program or practice from a research perspective as well as through data within the district.

An additional point of consideration for the team is to recognize that some of the related initiatives may have different expected outcomes for the specific practices. Initiatives that include practices with different outcomes may need to be aligned at the systems level only.

Step 4: Identify the core system features for initiatives targeted for alignment.

The team should identify the core system features of for each targeted initiative including: team-based leadership and coordination; evaluation of fidelity; a continuum of evidence-based practices; continuous data-based progress monitoring; comprehensive screening; and professional development that includes coaching with local content expertise. Section II of The Alignment Worksheet (Appendix B) can be used to organize information regarding the core system features of each initiative to prepare for analysis and decision-making about alignment. For example, the team will determine which initiatives have fidelity measures that indicate whether the initiative is being implemented as intended and at the right dosage level. Also, this step provides the team an opportunity to review currently used outcome measure(s) for each initiative (i.e., discipline problems decreasing, risk ratios decreasing, increasing attendance, or increasing on time graduation). The completion of Section II of the Alignment Worksheet will prepare the team to make decisions about consistency and efficiency regarding critical system features that support multiple initiatives including professional development/coaching, and evaluation.

Once all features have been identified for each targeted initiative, the team is now prepared to determine the "fit" of each initiative in relation to other existing initiatives, priorities, structures, supports, parent/community values, and the evidence for their adoption.

Step 5: Analyze and make decisions for alignment of initiatives.

The team should discuss the commonalities and differences of the system features of the related initiatives with focus on examining consistency and/or potential overlap. As part of this process the team should identify and resolve conflicts and/or duplicity of system features (e.g. eliminate duplicative teams at the building or district level, ensure all practices are monitored for fidelity and effectiveness, etc). The team should define what is acceptable, what may need to be changed, and determine which practices within each initiative can be aligned. Since progress monitoring is important to effectiveness, the team should identify practices without direct measures of fidelity and outcomes and make decisions about how to build fidelity measures and determine outcomes.

The next step is for the team to select any initiatives/practices that should be eliminated (practices overlapping or contraindicated) or modified (e.g., outcome redefined to address student benefit). Finally, the team should determine the value gained and/or lost in decisions regarding what to align and/or eliminate. Section III of The Alignment Worksheet is for action planning and is used to capture decisions with timelines and responsibilities.

Step 6: Design the plan for effective alignment including implementation, evaluation, and professional development.

The action plan should reflect team decisions regarding how the system features will be aligned to support efficiency and clarity at the district and building level (e.g., teaming structure, integrated data system, dosage of training and coaching). For practices with similar outcomes (e.g. social behavior functioning) this includes determination of how the practice features will be aligned at the classroom level. For example, if teachers are already teaching common behavioral expectations, how would additional social emotional

skills (determined by data) be integrated into the existing instruction? The team should also determine the use of common fidelity tool(s) to assess system features and core practices. The use of outcome measure(s) to support effective alignment should also be decided by the team. Finally, the team should define when and how leadership and staff are trained and supported to implement with accuracy and fluency (e.g., team training, coaching and capacity building).

Section II. Team adopts a formal process for adding new initiatives.

Once the team has completed the analysis and developed action steps for the alignment of current initiatives, they are now ready to consider if additional programs or practices are needed and if they can be efficiently assimilated into their overall system. *It is strongly recommended that district teams not consider adding new initiatives until they have completed the alignment process for all current related initiatives programs and practices.*

Section 2 of Appendix A can be used to guide the team in the selection and alignment of new/additional initiatives/practices using the same executive level team and decision-making process. The Alignment Worksheet can also be used to identify the core system features of the proposed new initiative or practice to ensure it is properly aligned within the existing system.

Step 1: For any new initiatives being considered, determine their "fit", including evidence-base among other initiatives.

The team should identify if there are any specific (gaps (based on data) and determine if a new practice/initiative should be considered to meet valued outcome(s). Before the team begins the decision-making process around any newly proposed initiatives, they should consider the status of existing initiatives they have decided to continue investing in and ensure they have the necessary resources (cost and time) for adding any new initiatives to the district plan.

For any new initiative program or practice being considered, the team should review the research literature to determine evidence for addressing any gaps in meeting valued outcome(s). Before making the decision to adopt a new practice program or initiative, the team should determine "fit" of the selected practice/initiative within existing structures. The NIRN's Hexagon Tool (Blase, Kiser, & Van Dyke, 2013) may be helpful to team's as they, decide the "fit" of a proposed practice/initiative in relation to existing, priorities, structures, supports, parent/community values, and the evidence for their adoption.

If the team determines a proposed new initiative/practice is needed to address a system gap, has evidence indicating it is likely to achieve desired outcomes, and has likelihood of being a good "fit", the team can proceed with the alignment process.

Step 2: If team determines new practice/initiative is to be adopted, team determines how the new practice/initiative can be aligned within the existing framework for related initiatives.

The team should determine how the new initiative's system features will be aligned with current efforts and how will the practices be aligned with the existing related practices. This includes decisions about installation through existing leadership, coordination, and professional development/coaching structures. Also, the team should identify tools and procedures for measuring fidelity as well as effectiveness and how these will be aligned with the existing evaluation system. For example, if a team were considering adding a specific social emotional curriculum, they would consider the connection and impact on current

instructional processes in the classroom, the ability of current teams to monitor progress within the current evaluation process, and the impact on professional development/coaching resources and activities.

Teams are encouraged to revisit the guiding questions from Steps 5 and 6 of Section I of the Self Assessment Action Planning Tool as needed to assist in alignment of system/data/practices of any new initiatives being considered. The Alignment Worksheet may also be helpful to ensure alignment. Streamlining and clarity for teachers at the classroom level, and avoiding duplicity and competition for evaluation and professional development resources should be prioritized.

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Appendix A

Alignment Self-Assessment Action Planning Tool

The Alignment Self-Assessment Action Planning Tool is used to provide a structured alignment process with concrete steps to: (a) examine current practices across educational units and systems (instruction, support, improvement, special education, mental health, justice), (b) consider the extent to which current practices are implemented with fidelity and produce meaningful academic and social/behavioral outcomes, and (c) assess the support systems to select install and implement new practices.

An executive level team constituted with the authority for organizational change should complete the Alignment Self-Assessment Action Planning Tool. This team should have responsibility for determining professional development, policy, and data management processes; and have budgetary authority for all initiatives being considered. Representatives on the team should include those who have detailed knowledge of the logic model, core practices of the initiatives to be aligned, and those leading implementation.

Each item should be scored as "Yes" in place. "No" not in place or "In process". Next, the team should review all their ratings and then designate each item as a "High" priority for action, a "Medium" priority for action, or a "Low" priority for action. Based on these ratings, the team should use the Alignment Worksheet (Appendix B) to conduct an analysis and develop an action plan focused on effective and efficient alignment of the designated initiatives in the school or district.

Appendix A: Alignment Self-Assessment Action Planning Tool

Question	Assessment	Priority for Action
Section I Assessment of Current Initiatives		
Step 1: Coordinate and lead alignment process with an executive level team.		
a) Does the team have the authority for organizational impact (i.e. professional development and coaching, policy, data management processes)?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
b) Does the team have budget authority for all initiatives being considered?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
c) Does the team include individuals with detailed knowledge of the theory, implementation logic model and core practices of proposed initiatives?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
d) Has the team determined if other members are required before proceeding?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
Step 2: Define the valued outcome(s) to be achieved		
a) Are the highly-valued outcome(s) for children and families defined for initiatives to be aligned (e.g., improved social emotional competence for all students)?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
Step 3: Develop an inventory of the related initiatives currently being implemented across the district.		
a) Has a list of all related initiatives including population served across schools and community agencies been developed?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
b) Has the department or division that oversees the initiative (i.e. budget authority), as well as individuals leading the implementation been identified?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
c) Has the research to determine the evidence of effectiveness for each initiative been reviewed/identified?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
d) Has the expected outcome(s) and documented results to date for each initiative been identified?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
Step 4: Has the team identified the core system features for initiatives targeted for alignment?		
a) Have the specifics of team based leadership and coordination for each related initiative been identified (including department/division at district level and including team structure at school building level)?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low

b) Have the fidelity measures for each initiative been identified?)	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
c) Have the specific core practices across each tier been identified?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
d) Have the outcome measure(s) been identified for each initiative (e.g., discipline problems decreasing, risk ratios decreasing, increasing attendance, increasing on time graduation)?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
e) Have the comprehensive screening measure(s) for each initiative been identified?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
f) Have the current professional development plans, including coaching with local content expertise) for each initiative been identified?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
Step 5: Analyze and make decisions for alignment of initiatives.		
a) Have commonalities and differences in system features of the related initiatives been examined for consistency and/or potential overlap?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
b) Has the team resolved conflicts and/or duplicity of system features (e.g., eliminate duplicative teams at building level, ensure all practices are monitored through a team)?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
c) Has the team defined what is acceptable and determined which practices within each initiative can be aligned?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
d) Has the team identified initiatives/practices without fidelity and outcomes assessment and determined if measurement is possible?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
e) Has the team determined which initiatives/practices should be eliminated (practices overlapping or contraindicated; measurement not possible) or modified (e.g. outcome redefined to address student benefit; fidelity measures added)?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
f) Has the team determined the value added and/or lost in decisions regarding what to align and/or eliminate?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
Step 6: Design the plan for effective alignment including implementation, evaluation and professional development.		
a) Has the team determined how the system features will be aligned to support efficiency and clarity at the building level (e.g., teaming structure, integrated data system, dosage of training and coaching)?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
b) Has the team determined how the practice features will be aligned at the school level (e.g., integration of social skills taught across tiers based on building level data)?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
c) Has the team determined the common fidelity tool(s) to assess system features and core practices?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
d) Has the team determined the outcome measure(s) to support effective alignment?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low

e) Has the team determined when and how leadership teams and staff are trained and supported (e.g. team training, coaching and capacity building)?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
Section II: Team adopts a formal process for adding new initiatives		
Step 1: For any new initiatives being considered, determine their "fit", including evidence-base among other initiatives.		
Has the team identified gaps and determined that a new practice/initiative is needed to better meet valued outcome(s)?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
Has the team reviewed research literature of a potential new initiative to determine evidence?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
Has the team reviewed and determined if proposed new initiative would 'fit" within existing structure of related initiatives (consider use of Hexagon Tool) (http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/sites/implementation.fpg.unc.edu/files/resources/NIRN-Education-TheHexagonTool.pdf)	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
Step 2: If team determines new practice/initiative is to be adopted, team determines how the new practice/initiative can be aligned within the existing framework for related initiatives.		
a) Has the team determined how the new practice/initiative can be installed through existing team-based leadership and coordination?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
b) Has the team determined how fidelity of the new practice/initiative will be measured?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
c) Has the team determined how the practices will be aligned with the existing related practices, with specific attention to clarity for how teachers and other practitioners will implement efficiently? (Note: Will other existing practices be eliminated or modified?)	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
d) Has the team defined a measure(s) that can assess effectiveness and that is aligned with existing evaluation system?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
e) Has the team determined fit with existing universal screening measures for the new practice/initiative or if existing screening will be modified?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low
f) Has the team determined how and when teams/staff will receive professional development, including coaching, to implement with accuracy and to ensure fluency?	Yes No In Process	High Med Low

Appendix B

Alignment Worksheet

Section I: Create an inventory of initiatives to be aligned.

A. Identify each initiative, program or practice to be aligned across the top of the table.
B. Identify department or division, with budget authority, overseeing initiative.
C. Identify population served.
D. List research that determines evidence of effectiveness.
E. List/summarize outcomes achieved to date.

Section I	Initiative A	Initiative B	Initiative C	Initiative D
Name of Initiatives to be Aligned				
1. Name of lead department/division with budget authority				
2. Population served (e.g. Tier I, II, III, students, staff, families, grade level)				
3. Research based (e.g. peer reviewed)				
4. Outcome(s) achieved to date in the district/schools				

Section II: Identify and analyze the MTSS core features for each initiative.

A. **Identify core features for each initiative**

B. **After identifying core features for each initiative, examine the table to:**

1) **Determine areas of commonality and differences in MTSS core features. Are there areas of potential overlap (e.g. climate team and equity team providing similar professional development content, have cross membership but function separately due to budget authority housed in separate departments)?**

2) **Determine areas of conflict within MTSS features (e.g. contraindicated practices relying on reactive responses conflicting with initiatives based on prevention and proactive/instructional responses).**

3) **Review items that are left blank (e.g. no fidelity tool for some initiatives, no structure for providing coaching support and performance feedback).**

4) **Determine initiatives that could be eliminated. (e.g. initiative showing no evidence/impact on student behavior).**

Section II: List the MTSS core system features used to implement initiative:				
1. Leadership Team **a. Name of team** **b. Individuals on team** **c. Individuals who provide coordination**				
2. Fidelity measure(s).				
3. Core practices by tier.				
4. Outcome measure(s).				
5. Comprehensive screening measure(s)				
6. Professional development plan including process for coaching supports and performance feedback.				

Section III: Action Planning

Based on the above analysis and decisions, determine and list the alignment action(s) for each MTSS feature, including person(s) responsible and timeline.

Section III: Design an action plan for effective alignment:			
MTSS Feature	**Action Items**	**Who?**	**When?**
1. Leadership Team			
2. Evaluation			
3. Evidence Base			
4. Progress monitoring and decision making system			
5. Screening Process			

6. Professional Development			

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