IMPLEMENTING MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT IN CONTINUATION

HIGH SCHOOLS

BY

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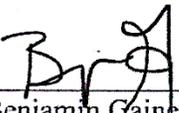
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ABSTRACT

The problem addressed in this study was that there remains limited research on how continuation schools implement evidence-based, multi-tiered programs (i.e., Multi-Tiered System of Support [MTSS]) to increase students' academic and behavioral success. Through this qualitative study, the effectiveness of communication between the district and school administrators in northern California continuation schools regarding the challenges of implementing MTSS programs was explored. Through purposive sampling, six participants represented the northern California continuation high school population of about 300 schools: three participants held administration experience, and three were teachers who responded to the email invitation. I addressed the research question using narrative design. The stories of individually interviewed participants were analyzed and summarized from a single representative perspective. The process data and interviews were recorded and transcribed using Dedoose software and coded for thematic analysis. All six participants indicated the continuation high school setting was very different from the comprehensive high school setting. They all said communication was an essential factor, and both sides should include more voices, including those of teachers and administrators. I concluded that communication between the district and school administrators in northern California needs to improve to present a practical MTSS implementation framework. The findings of this study will inform and guide administrators to further understand the MTSS implementation framework.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Continuation high schools are designed to meet the needs of students who are not on track to graduate from high school. Students who attend continuation high schools take grade-level courses and classes designed to recover credits from courses they failed during 9th–10th grades. Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) teams aid students at risk for or already underperforming compared to appropriate grade- or age-level standards (Samuels, 2016). The goal is to regain academic progress lost during prior school experience (California Department of Education, 2020). Without full awareness of teachers' challenges when working with MTSS implementation teams, it is difficult for district administrators to support these teams' efforts effectively.

This qualitative, narrative study aimed to identify misalignment in communication between district and local administrators regarding challenges of implementing MTSS and to understand better how the studied district could support teachers and administrators on a local level. The MTSS strategy was introduced following the latest developments of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990). In 2004, the U.S. government amended IDEA to include provisions addressing Response to Intervention (RTI) within the No Child Left Behind Act (2004). Consequently, MTSS strategies began with broad implementation, but there has not yet been enough opportunity to investigate practical execution of the challenges associated with this implementation. Such a gap in research is essential to fill because the number of students requiring MTSS for academic success is substantial (California Department of Education, 2020).

Study Background/Foundation

MTSS is an umbrella framework that encompasses two additional frameworks: RTI and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS). Both RTI and PBIS address student learning, behavior, and responses at differing levels of students' individual needs. Teachers are initially responsible for identifying students who need interventions and then supporting the students in the classroom setting by differentiating instruction and providing an aligned curriculum.

MTSS provides tiered support and intervention. The tiered support levels address students' academic support and social–behavioral support (Forman & Crystal, 2015). Tier 1 of instruction includes all students in the classroom. Tier 2 involves instruction intensity, including additional academic or behavioral support based on students' assessments (Forman & Crystal, 2015). One example of this support includes a student receiving more time on an assignment or further curriculum enhancement (Forman & Crystal, 2015).

Tier 2 intervention is highly demanding, with approximately 15% to 20% of all students requiring this framework (Witzel & Clarke, 2015). Tier 3 is for students who need the most academic interventions and might include afterschool tutoring or one-on-one instruction. Teachers have the best opportunity to enhance intervention and education in their classrooms by providing standards-based and differentiated core instruction for all students (Banks & Obiakor, 2015).

MTSS is complex; consequently, the framework is challenging to implement successfully without adequate administrative support. In northern California, the number of students in continuation high schools who would benefit from MTSS has continued to

grow (California Department of Education, 2020). Students' needs vary, and this variance adds complexity to MTSS implementation. Developing unity between district and local administrators when navigating the challenges of implementing MTSS is unquestionably significant.

Current State of the Field in Which the Problem Exists

Lack of developed learning skills and academic misalignment with peers contributes to a higher chance of failing courses in the continuation high school system. According to the California Department of Education (2020), there are approximately 800 continuation schools in California. Additionally, about 4.5% of state public high school students attend these programs annually (Johnson & Howley, 2015). The actual numbers could be higher because this statistic does not include students who begin in the continuation school program and then prematurely drop the program (California Department of Education, 2020); therefore, many California students are considered an at-risk population.

Additionally, administrators have used the continuation school system as a day placement for students who need part-time work (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008; Ruiz de Velasco & Gonzales, 2017). These students enroll in the high school population, but they are credit deficient and not on track to graduate high school (Ruiz de Velasco & Gonzales, 2017). Consequently, well-trained academic instructors often do not adequately serve students in need.

The U.S. Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 fused the creation of continuation schools to provide students with academic and accelerated credit recovery strategies, so students have an opportunity to complete classes needed to graduate from

high school (Andreou et al., 2015). Continuation schools serve students and create partnerships with local community colleges to continue their education.

Continuation schools are also where pregnant or parenting students are often referred to by comprehensive high schools (EdSource, 2020). The caveat is many continuation schools do not offer college-prep courses needed to attend a 4-year university (Balu et al., 2015). Students who attend continuation schools and graduate go into the workforce, military, or 2-year community colleges (EdSource, 2020). Pregnant students, parents, and academically behind students are more likely to drop out of school if they do not have academic support, such as supports offered by MTSS.

Continuation school programs employ different strategies for student engagement; among these strategies are smaller classes, flexible schedules, counseling, mental health services, and a focus on student–teacher relationships (Gregory et al., 2016). Attending continuation schools may be the only option besides dropping out. Continuation schools allow students with discipline and academic problems to complete high school under less structured plans.

The number of continuation schools has continued to grow and has more than doubled over the past 5 years (Johnson & Howley, 2015). Johnson and Howley (2015) argued that these students are not graduating from programs that demand the same knowledge, skills, and rigor as needed for a comprehensive high school diploma. Students sent to continuation schools often have previous experiences that include drugs, alcohol, weapons, or violence. Other students have to attend for reasons that include rudeness, use of cell phones in class, pregnancy, or failing grades (Johnson & Howley, 2015). Students who attend continuation schools are often behind academically and given

below-grade-level academics to advance into the next grade level or graduate with a high school diploma.

Continuation school personnel who implement MTSS intend to provide students with academic strategies via tiered instructional intervention and a social–behavioral component to help them close academic gaps. MTSS serves as an RTI that supports students' academic, social, and behavioral needs (Pas, Johnson, et al., 2019). The goal of MTSS is to meet students' academic and social–behavioral needs (Lacireno-Paquet & Reedy, 2015). Still, components of MTSS are challenging to implement, and when combined with issues facing continuation schools, staff members must be provided with practical training and leadership workshops.

Historical Background

MTSS is a framework that helps educators provide academic and behavioral strategies for students (California Department of Education, 2020). MTSS developed from integrating two other intervention-based frameworks: RTI and PBIS (Eagle et al., 2015). RTI is a process of gathering academic data from students after implementing classroom instruction changes (Fuchs et al., 2015). The teacher and the student's parent(s) recommend the student for more academic testing when data demonstrate a need for additional academic support.

California Department of Education (2020) reported MTSS requires high-quality, evidence-based instruction, intervention, and assessment practices to ensure every student receives the appropriate levels of support for success. Implementation of MTSS supports school and district personnel in organizing resources by aligning academic standards and behavioral expectations (Witzel & Clarke, 2015). When MTSS is implemented with

fidelity and sustained over time, it effectively helps every student successfully reach their fullest potential (Witzel & Clarke, 2015); therefore, effective implementation of MTSS is an important area of emergent research.

Implementation of MTSS presents several challenges, including policy, leadership, and communication. Compliance with existing educational regulations is a critical concern for school districts. California Department of Education requires districts to implement MTSS and other strategies to meet the diversity of students' academic and behavioral needs (Sailor, 2015). Because most students who benefit from MTSS have unique and quickly changing needs, it is challenging for district and local administrators to effectively communicate teachers' obstacles in supporting students under the MTSS implementation framework.

Through this study, I aimed to fill an existing gap in research on challenges district administrators face with teachers implementing MTSS at continuation schools in northern California. In the classroom, improved student outcomes can occur when MTSS provides equitable, tiered, universally designed systems of support that address students' academic, behavioral, and social–emotional well-being in culturally sustaining ways (Charlton et al., 2018). Prior research has presented evidence of the relationship between children's behavioral development and academic achievement (Vogel, 2018). These essential components are a major part of school leaders' challenges, such as tracking intervention effectiveness and improving support in the classroom for all students (Lee & Gage, 2020). Focusing on school leadership and teachers within the system and how the system operates can help school leaders find solutions.

RTI is a process used to support the needs of below-grade-level learners in mainstream classrooms through individual intervention practices or by identifying students who have learning disabilities and require assessment (Sailor et al., 2018). MTSS is a framework that screens all students for academic challenges and social emotional–behavioral problems; the goal is to meet all students' needs (Charlton et al., 2018). RTI and MTSS both use a tiered approach to interventions based on student data to meet their identified needs.

Academic interventions are the focus of RTIs, and PBIS is a separate framework designed to support student behavior (Massar & Horner, 2016). PBIS is a framework that provides supports to students, including universal screening, progress monitoring, and data-driven decision making based on behavior (Printy & Williams, 2015). The PBIS framework intends to instruct and reinforce positive behavior on school campuses and create a positive school climate.

MTSS is an umbrella framework that includes both RTI and PBIS. RTI is a multi-tiered framework for academic supports, and PBIS is a multi-tiered framework for behavioral supports. RTI and PBIS both provide support at different levels based on what the student needs: at the schoolwide level (i.e., Tier 1), targeted level (i.e., Tier 2), and individual level (i.e., Tier 3; McIntosh et al., 2016).

Deficiencies in the Evidence

Students who attend continuation schools are often referred to as an at-risk population (EdSource, 2020). School district stakeholders use the term *at-risk* to describe students or groups of students considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school. The term at risk is also describes students who

experience homelessness, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, serious health issues, domestic violence, or transiency, any of which could jeopardize their ability to graduate from high school (Weist et al., 2018). Multi-tiered, schoolwide approaches that minimize or eliminate barriers and improve student outcomes are practical when designed through tiered, universally designed support systems. MTSS is a framework school officials use to provide targeted support to students by focusing on the whole child (Lacireno-Paquet & Reedy, 2015). MTSS closes the gap for continuation school students by offering conducive academic and behavioral supports.

Teachers and school administrators use the term *learning disabilities* to refer to individual students more likely to fail or drop out and who need academic and behavioral intervention. Occasionally, school personnel also refer to at-risk students as having learning disabilities, low test scores, disciplinary problems, or other academic learning factors possibly affecting their ability to graduate from high school (Samuels, 2016). MTSS supports academic growth and achievement, but it also supports behavior, social–emotional needs, and absenteeism (Andreou et al., 2015).

McCart and Miller (2020) examined the effects of prosocial behavior on students' development in academic and social domains. They found certain behaviors toward third graders, such as cooperating, helping, sharing, and consoling, were strong predictors of eighth-grade academic achievement (Dowdy et al., 2015). Students at continuation schools are academically below grade level and struggle to connect socially with peers. Developing small group interventions, social–emotional learning (SEL) lessons, and mentoring programs can decrease negative behaviors and provide positive interventions

(Maras et al., 2015). Teacher collaboration is critical for ensuring these interventions work when implementing MTSS.

Problem Statement

Continuation schools are typically small, with populations between 60 and 200 students (California Department of Education, 2020). Similar to other small schools, if the resources received from their district are based solely on the number of students they serve, administrators often do not have extra funds to support additional staff positions (Ruiz de Velasco & Gonzales, 2017). Lack of support staff may lead to worse experiences for students who require outside resources. Limited effective communication strategies also affect students' academic success with secular issues, such as homelessness, prior or present incarceration, teenage pregnancy, health issues, or domestic violence (Freeman et al., 2017). Understanding ways to bridge the support gap could positively impact students' academic success in northern California continuation schools.

Audience

The audience for this study included district and school administrators in northern California. This study provides insights for improving the MTSS framework by identifying strategies to promote collaboration. Leaders could support MTSS implementation by providing teachers with targeted professional development and student support (Eagle et al., 2015).

Specific Leadership Problem

Teacher collaboration in schools is an essential component for effective implementation of MTSS because it allows leadership to dedicate resources for student

support in small groups amid individualized instruction (Eagle et al., 2015). Lack of better understanding prevents the implementation of appropriate interventions to at-risk students in an alternative school setting. Consequently, this problem results in ineffective implementation of MTSS, leading to missed learning opportunities for students, widened gaps among students, and even academic failures among at-risk students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to identify the challenges administrators and teachers face during MTSS implementation. Interviews with district and local administrators identified challenges in teacher collaboration when implementing MTSS programs in northern California continuation schools. There remains limited research on how continuation schools implement evidence-based, multi-tiered programs (i.e., MTSS) to increase students' academic and behavioral success. Educators face limited resources and the absence of nonacademic, mainstream classroom assessment measures; additionally, many schools began Fall 2020 with distance learning. This study fills the gap in understanding what administrators at different levels perceive as challenges in collaboration with teachers when implementing MTSS programs in northern California continuation schools.

The significance of the study is it provides timely information and recommendations to district and school administrators to communicate effectively about teachers' challenges when implementing MTSS at continuation schools in northern California. Implementing MTSS requires district and school administrators to respond to shifts in school culture, and help staff adapt and stay focused on sustaining MTSS (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). After reading this study, district and school administrators

may better understand the application of leadership and the importance of effective communication. Using implementation science principles when implementing MTSS is essential because it is considered the missing piece in the evidence-based puzzle (Freeman et al., 2015). In addition, district and school administrators can use the interview data to develop an essential understanding of the skills, knowledge, and practices necessary to implement and sustain MTSS in their school communities.

Methodology and Research Design Overview

Qualitative narrative analysis is a research design comprising philosophical assumptions and inquiry (Patton, 2015). In this study, I collected data using structured interviews and applied narrative analysis. Narrative analysis was implemented in this qualitative study and used in the structured interview design. I conducted structured interviews on the phone or used electronic videoconferencing, and recorded participants' responses with permission. Qualitative methodology involves philosophical assumptions that guide the collection and analysis of qualitative approaches in many phases of the research process (Patton, 2015). Using narrative analysis and a qualitative approach together provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.

Qualitative research is a research design with philosophical assumptions and methods of inquiry (Merriam, 2006). Qualitative research involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of data collection and analysis of qualitative approaches in many phases of the research process (Patton, 2015). It allows the researcher to focus on collecting and analyzing qualitative data into a single study. Using a qualitative approach provides a better understanding of research problems than solely focusing on philosophical assumptions or methods of inquiry.

A narrative approach allowed participants to share preparedness and focus on their own lived experiences rather than general attitudes and beliefs toward teachers' challenges in implementing MTSS in continuation schools (Freeman et al., 2017). A qualitative narrative study was deemed most appropriate due to the need for generalized findings for the selected population (Clandinin, 2016). The qualitative narrative design enabled the retelling of stories from different perspectives, and I drew conclusions from alignment or lack of alignment in their respective positions. In this study, the northern California continuation high school population was represented by six participants: three from administrator positions and three from school-site levels.

Research Question

The following research question guided this study:

RQ: What do district administrators know about teachers implementing MTSS in
continuation schools in northern California?

Study Limitations

Several factors beyond a researcher's control are considered study limitations. These limitations could include constraints such as time, resources, or access (Simon & Goes, 2013). I considered time and access constraints of this study; the close of the school year was approaching, and administrator availability was limited. There were also other limitations associated with this study, including:

- Small sample size: The interviewed participants were a small group associated with one school site. A small group is limiting due to a narrow scope of insight (Merriam, 2006).

- One school: The studied district only consists of one continuation high school with fewer than 200 enrolled students. The number of school administrators and teachers available for interview was correspondingly small.

- Three school districts: The study focus was on three school districts in northern California, each of medium size compared to other districts in California.

- The quality of data were subjective due to the focus on a small school district, small sample size, and experiences, feelings, beliefs, and desires toward MTSS.

- I used field notes, questionnaires, and interviews to gather data, and data collection was limited due to the small sample size.

- The data collected in this study relied primarily on the truthfulness of answers provided by participants.

- The factors and needs of teacher collaboration at a continuation school may be different than at traditional high schools.

Limitations of this study and the research question presented in this section included researcher positionality, site selection, and the participant selection process. Second, this section included a discussion of procedures used to collect data and an explanation of the interview process. The interview protocol process and data analysis were similarly detailed (Gibbs, 2009). As part of the discussion on limitations, there were concerns with the validity of instrumentation and data collected and analyzed (Maxwell, 2012).

The limited investigations completed on this emergent topic and my lack of prior experience conducting a doctoral research project served as two additional limitations.

Limitations also included the inconsistency of participants' job roles and the inconsistency of different stages each site faced with implementation and training of MTSS. Other limitations included participant responses; some participants may have withheld information about their sites because they did not want it to appear as if the school had problems. Another potential limitation is participants may not have had ample time to respond to the interview questions, which may have impeded results (Nilsen, 2015). Due to the low response rate, generalizability is not possible. Additional research with a larger sample size would be needed to generalize these findings and better understand how continuation schools implement MTSS.

Study Delimitations

This study assumed effective implementation of MTSS is important in continuation schools. I conducted research using the perspectives of school staff on implementing MTSS. I also used the implementation science framework to measure the three categories of implementation drivers: competency, organization, and leadership (Nilsen, 2015). Through this study, I also explored what stage of implementation the schools were at and what core MTSS components are sustained in the context of practices, organizations, and systems (Fixsen et al., 2013).

The participant sample size was small due to participant criteria established in the scope of the study. I did not collect responses from comprehensive schools. Small sample size was appropriate, considering the scope of the research question. I selected the northern California region to narrow the study within available resources. The design of this qualitative study did not consider other methodologies, such as epistemology or a narrative approach, for data collection (Bradshaw et al., 2019). A broader study would

require expanding to other districts of the diverse state of California, necessitating resources beyond the means available for the study; thus, findings and results may not necessarily generalize to other subjects, locations, or future periods.

Definitions of Key Terms

For this study, I defined *effective communication* as when district and local administrators are aware of the statuses, challenges, and successes of high school teachers in implementing MTSS. Other applicable terms are defined as follows:

Administrators: Administrators serves as an umbrella term for district administrators, high school principals, and assistant principals.

Evidence-Based Practice (EBP): An EBP refers to a program or practice or intervention that has been proven through research-based and science-based studies to have positive effects on measured outcomes (Gage et al., 2014).

Interventions: Interventions are levels, or tiers, of support offered to an individual or group (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017).

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS): MTSS is a systematic, continuous-improvement framework in which educators practice data-based problem solving and decision making across all levels of the educational system for supporting students (Samuels, 2016).

Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS): PBIS is a schoolwide, multi-tiered approach to discipline that embraces restorative disciplinary practices emphasizing prevention and proactive intervention (Tyre & Feuerborn, 2017).

Response to Intervention (RTI): RTI is a process for supporting the needs of below-grade-level learners in mainstream classrooms through individual intervention practices

or identifying students who have learning disabilities and will need to be assessed (Samuels, 2016).

Tier 1 Instruction: MTSS typically applies three tiers of intervention support (Fullan, 2015). The first tier is for all students who receive a base level of academic or universal instruction, called Tier 1, regardless of program designation or grouping. Tier 1 is for 100% of students in a classroom (Freeman et al., 2017).

Tier 2 Instruction: A small group of students, between 15–25%, receive Tier 2 support (Bradshaw et al., 2019). These students require intervention and support to maintain or progress to the median level of academic performance, compared to grade-level peers (Fuchs et al., 2015). Tier 2 students receive Tier 1 instruction and additional support to meet the median performance or skill level (Anderson et al., 2009).

Tier 3 Instruction: Students who require additional support outside the Tier 2 level receive the most intensive, individualized intervention support, and those students are identified in Tier 3. Tier 3 students typically makeup about 5% of the scholar population and require intensive intervention and support to meet the median performance or skill level (Freeman et al., 2006).

Summary

Qualitative methodology was most appropriate for this study due to the need for generalized findings for the selected population. Using a narrative design, I investigated associations with implementation drivers and implementation of MTSS in continuation public schools in northern California. A narrative design was appropriate because participants shared experiences and practices related to the implementation of MTSS in continuation schools (Gibbs, 2009). In Chapter 1, I discussed the problem statement, gap

in existing knowledge, and need for the study. I also included a proposal for the research question and methodology to address the study's merit. The need to understand how district and local administrators view teachers' challenges when implementing MTSS in northern California continuation schools has been established in recent literature. This need is discussed more fully in Chapter 2. Understanding perspectives allowed me to find better solutions to make the implementation process most beneficial to students.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature established that schools and districts implement Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) to support all students to address academic and behavioral interventions. The literature review helped me to identify gaps in existing research and illustrated correlations between current and past studies focused on leadership and challenges school leaders have regarding collaboration and communication (Hall & Hord, 2011). Challenges to this topic have largely been associated with a lack of leadership support, unclear roles or purpose, inadequate resources, and confusion on analyzing and using information (Rickards & Stitt-Bergh, 2016). Sicat et al. (2014) found that not creating an environment for open dialogue nor communicating regularly could exacerbate challenges for collaboration and communication, along with the inability to discover shared professional issues.

I justified the choice of theoretical lens for the study and the research question through the following review of literature. In this chapter, I provide a brief, focused review of related literature on how schools and districts implement MTSS to support students in addressing academic and behavioral interventions. The fundamental theories addressed in Chapter 2 include transformational leadership and its role in influencing teachers' attitudes toward their performances with students (Bass, 2005). The second framework involves change theory; Lewin (1951) suggested active staff participation in the change planning process often minimizes resistance to change. Active participation requires communication among leaders to their staff.

Multi-Tiered System of Support

MTSS is a systematic, continuous-improvement framework in which data-based problem solving and decision making is practiced across all educational system levels to support students (Lacireno-Paquet & Reedy, 2015). California Department of Education (2020) states MTSS uses high-quality, evidence-based instruction, intervention, and assessment practices to ensure every student receives an appropriate level of support to be successful. MTSS helps schools and districts organize resources by aligning academic standards and behavioral expectations, implemented with fidelity and sustained over time, to enable every child to successfully reach their fullest potential (Witzel & Clarke, 2015). Effective practices in implementing MTSS are an important area for research.

Compliance with laws and regulations that govern education is a primary concern for most school districts when developing and implementing MTSS to meet all students' academic and behavioral needs (Yell & Walker, 2010). The challenge that arises is that students who attend continuation schools are considered at risk because they are academically below grade level and have behavior incidents that negatively impact their school careers.

Implementation of MTSS presents several challenges, including policy, leadership, communication, and compliance with existing educational regulations that can be a critical concern for school districts. School districts are required to implement MTSS and other strategies to meet the diversity of students' academic and behavioral needs (Sailor, 2015). Most students who benefit from MTSS have unique and quickly changing needs-sets (Lloyd et al., 2019); hence, it is challenging for district and local

administrators to communicate effectively about teachers' obstacles in supporting students within the MTSS implementation framework.

Through this study, I aimed to fill an existing research gap about collaboration and communication challenges while implementing MTSS at continuation schools in northern California. Prior research has presented evidence of the relationship between children's behavioral development and academic achievement (Vogel, 2018). Within the classroom, improved student outcomes can occur when MTSS is equitable, tiered, and a universally designed system of support that addresses students' academic, behavior, and social–emotional well-being in culturally sustaining ways (Massar & Horner, 2016). These essential components are part of the challenges facing school leaders, such as tracking intervention effectiveness and improving supports (Pas, Ryoo, et al., 2019); therefore, focusing on school leadership and students within the continuation high school system, and how the system operates, can help leaders find solutions.

The challenge that arises is students who attend continuation schools are considered at risk because they are academically below grade level and affiliated with behavior incidents that have harmed their school careers (Bradshaw et al., 2019). The MTSS model provides increased support levels for students, identified through universal screening or other school assessment benchmarks (McDermott et al., 2019). The MTSS model outlines varying levels of support for students.

McDermott et al. (2019) investigated the causes of high school student dropouts. In their study, they asked students about their high school experiences and the factors involved in their decision to drop out. The researchers' methodology included inquiry into subcategories of at-risk populations, including course failure, boredom, not seeing

the relevance of schooling, and lack of concern for absences. Students expressed they did not feel needed or of importance. Approximately 52.3% of students responded they dropped out due to a challenging organizational environment (McDermott et al., 2019). Those students defined *environment* as a product of lack of engagement from teachers and administrators to meet their needs; therefore, the gap in research is district administrators need to become aware of teachers' challenges when implementing MTSS in continuation schools in northern California.

Continuation Schools in California

California's continuation high schools serve 11–12th-grade students and are designed for students who have failed courses at the ninth and 10th-grade levels and are not on track to graduate (Starr & White, 2008). There is only one continuation school in any given school district. Continuation schools often comprise at-risk scholar populations who struggle with exposure to violence, victimization, alcohol and substance abuse, and homelessness. These schools also have more concentrated groups of people of color (Ruiz de Velasco & Gonzales, 2017). Continuation school personnel face challenges, such as (a) increased at-risk scholar populations, (b) students academically considered below grade level, (c) a larger percentage of special education and English language learners, (d) students behind credits to graduate on time, and (e) students with more behavior incidents than their peers at comprehensive schools (Starr & White, 2008).

Student Outcomes

Multi-tiered, schoolwide approaches that minimize or eliminate barriers and improve scholar outcomes are effective when designed through tiered, universally designed systems of support (Hall & Hord, 2011). Researchers have found a relationship

exists between children's behavioral development and their academic achievement (Fuchs et al., 2015). MTSS is a framework that school personnel use to provide targeted support to students by focusing on the whole child; it supports academic growth and achievement and also supports behavior, social and emotional needs, and absenteeism (Yell & Walker, 2010). Caprara et al. (2000) examined the effects of prosocial behavior on a student's development in academic and social domains. They found certain behaviors in third graders, such as cooperating, helping, sharing, and consoling, were strong predictors of eighth-grade academic achievement (Caprara et al., 2000).

Students at continuation schools are academically below grade level and struggle to connect socially with peers. Developing small group interventions, social–emotional learning (SEL) lessons, and mentoring programs can decrease negative behaviors and provide positive interventions (Sullivan & Artiles, 2011). The key factor for all of this is faculty collaboration to implement MTSS. Eagle et al. (2015) stated leaders could support MTSS implementation by providing staff professional development and scholar support.

Under MTSS, students need instruction in academic and social–behavioral learning to prevent challenges. There is a connection between behavior and academics. The largest evidence-based research project in education, identified as the system of Response to Intervention (RTI), provides data to show such a correlation (Samuels, 2016). Sailor et al. (2018) found using a statistical model to determine the effective size of programs and practices was associated with student academic improvement. Similarities have been found in student learning improvements, and the benefits of RTI include improved performance on statewide tests, reading proficiency, and improved attendance.

MTSS Essential Components

The MTSS model provides increased levels of support for students identified via universal screening or other school benchmarks (Fixsen et al., 2013). MTSS outlines varying levels of support for students. These supports can vary in duration, frequency, group size, and intensity (Severson et al., 2007). Nantais (2014) explored the student's duration of receiving the intervention, including the length and the frequency of the sessions or number of weeks. Intensity encompasses duration, frequency, and group size. The more intense a student's need, the more frequently and longer the support will need to be provided (Nantais, 2014). Challenges facing leaders include tracking the effectiveness of interventions, and doing so requires a data system that measures and responds to data across academics, attendance, behavior, and SEL (Preston et al., 2013).

Roles for general and special education teachers supporting MTSS implementation continue to change (Osborne-Lampkin & Folsom, 2017). Teacher, administrator, school, and district attitudes toward changing roles will take time, but rules governing these newer practices are not firmly in place (Vogel, 2018). Leadership must support pedagogical adoptions and organizational innovations like MTSS and RTI, providing more focused professional development and sound decision-making processes (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). In existing research, a lack of knowledge about the role school leaders have in implementing MTSS has been considered (Eagle et al., 2015). Having a leader who consistently trains their staff using best practices of MTSS ensures adequate implementation of intervention support.

Due to the potential success of MTSS, some 90% of the teachers Jones (2018) surveyed indicated once MTSS were implemented in teachers' classrooms, behavioral

issues significantly decreased. Jones advised school districts should provide Positive

Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) training for teachers on implementing and using

MTSS. Teachers' lack of proper MTSS training was a common theme. Jones also noted

teacher concerns that some children may not respond to behavior modification strategies.

Jones found administrators should provide additional training strategies and research to

address this issue.

Another qualitative research study involved six educators who completed an

open-ended survey questionnaire (Choi et al., 2019). In their study, Choi et al. (2019)

sought to investigate best practices for RTI within MTSS and revealed that meeting all

students' needs is a result of effective leadership that establishes communication among

the principal, teachers, parents, and other educational professionals. The core concept is

leadership increases the successful implementation of RTI (Choi et al., 2017).

To further support this concept, Choi et al. (2017) also investigated an in-depth

understanding of secondary school RTI implementation processes, specifically at the high

school level. The authors based their findings on interviews with administrators, and

compared these results to four essential components of RTI set forth by the National

Center on Response to Intervention (Freeman et al., 2017). Consistently, according to

Fuchs et al. (2015), "One of our most important findings was that schools that

demonstrated the highest levels of RTI implementation also demonstrated the highest

levels of district and principal leadership" (p. 31). When Fuchs et al. interviewed staff

members, the most common response was their principals were fully involved in MTSS

and invested in the entire implementation process.

Purposes of MTSS

Three concepts—RTI, PBIS, and evidence-based practices (EBPs)—help create an inclusive, tiered system of academic and behavioral supports for all students (Witzel & Clarke, 2015). Tier 1 of instruction includes all students in the classroom. Tier 2 involves the intensity of instruction, including additional academic or behavioral support based upon student assessments (Metz et al., 2007). One example might consist of a student receiving more time on an assignment or additional curriculum enhancement. The common trend is 15% to 20% of students need Tier 2 intervention (Metz et al., 2007). Tier 3 is for students who need the most academic interventions; these interventions might include afterschool tutoring or one-on-one instruction. Educators use student progress monitoring to measure the effectiveness of the intervention, so the student can successfully learn Tier 1 instruction (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016).

MTSS is a framework that screens all students for academic challenges and social–emotional–behavioral problems; the goal is to meet all students' needs (Sailor et al., 2018). RTI and MTSS both use a tiered approach to intervention based on student data to meet the identified needs of students. RTI is a process for supporting the needs of below-grade-level learners in mainstream classrooms through individual intervention practices or by identifying students who have learning disabilities and will require further assessment (Freeman et al., 2015).

RTIs focus is on academic interventions, and PBIS is a separate framework designed to support student behavior. PBIS is a framework that provides student supports, universal screening, progress monitoring, and data-driven decision making

based on behavior (Forman & Crystal, 2015). The MTSS framework reinforces positive behavior on school campuses and creates a positive school climate.

There is an established connection between behavior and academics (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). In MTSS, students need instruction in academics and social–behavioral learning to prevent challenges. Hattie (2012) found using a statistical model to determine the effect size of programs and practices is associated with students' academic improvement. Other researchers have found similar improvements in student learning, noting benefits of RTI include improved performance on statewide tests, reading proficiency, and improved attendance (Fuchs et al., 2015).

Theoretical Framework

Few theories appear to help implement evidence-based, multi-tiered programs like MTSS, which increases students' academic and behavioral success. Existing literature supports that successful implementation requires effective communication between leadership and executive teams about challenges in the process (Choi et al., 2019); therefore, I reviewed change theory and relevant aspects of leadership theory as theoretical frameworks for the study.

Transformational Leadership

The theory of transformational leadership is anchored from a vision to transform people and is influenced by Maslow's (1968) theory of human needs. This theory explains the importance of attaining the basic needs and security of individuals when it conforms to a transactional leadership style. Followers remain subordinate to their leaders, and deficiency in performance jeopardizes administrators' or leaders' desired

outcomes (Day et al., 2016). Maslow believed working harder for money would fulfill an individual's basic, psychological, or security needs.

In education, Maslow's (1968) pyramid of needs extends to desire for a higher level of self-realization and involves considering morality, self-esteem, ethical issues, and dignity. In the educational setting, transformational leadership fits into higher levels of needs because it requires a higher level of self-esteem, authenticity, morality, and dignity to perform this kind of leadership (Thomas et al., 2020). Transformational leadership is where leaders are motivated in the same way as followed by the outcome of organization. This type of leadership involves a value that encourages collaboration, rather than working as individuals. Moreover, transformational leadership applies to the participatory approach of leadership, where concerns are not about achieving high academic status; rather, the focus is on the quality of education for students by extending more efforts with a sincere desire beyond the expectation of everyone (Bass, 2005). I chose transformational leadership to answer the research question: What do school and district administrators know about teachers implementing MTSS in northern California continuation high schools?

Transformational leadership theory explains a change in individuals and systems that support personal growth for both leaders and followers (Bass, 2005). Transformational leadership creates valuable and positive change in followers, with the goal of developing followers into leaders. Positive change can include connecting the follower's sense of identity and self to the mission and collective identity of the organization (Burns, 1978). Additionally, transformational leadership relates to the topic

of this study because it considers collaboration among school leaders and adequate training for teachers to prepare them to better implement MTSS.

Transformational leadership allows leaders to broaden the interests of employees (Bass, 2005). Leaders allow followers to face challenges and find solutions by themselves, and teachers are more involved in school affairs. Transformational leadership also brings about professionalism in teaching staff by allowing them autonomy and room to improve their professionalism (Fullan, 2015).

Thomas et al. (2020) investigated administrators' transformational leadership and their role in influencing teachers' attitudes toward their performance with students. The researchers found teachers' positive attitude correlates with job performance and indirectly relates to transformational leaders. If teachers feel their administration cares and is adaptable as leaders, they are more likely to pass these traits to their students and create better rapport. An organization that embraces differences and enables staff members to use diversity to encourage differences can lead to a better, cohesive school environment (Yukl, 1999). Teachers with transformational leaders as administrators have less role conflict, higher task performance, and higher satisfaction (Samuels, 2016). Educators who are transformational leaders get positive results, including higher student engagement with their course material and other school pursuits.

Leadership should be viewed as a mutually influential process whereby instructional leaders influence school outcomes through school mission and cultural alignment. Day et al. (2016) researched transformational leadership at the secondary level and found school leaders focused on raising the quality of teaching and learning.

Successful leaders draw differentially on transformational leadership elements and tailor their leadership strategies to their schools and teachers.

Supports can vary in duration, frequency, group size, and intensity. Duration is when the student receives the intervention, such as the length of sessions or the number of weeks (Bradshaw et al., 2015). Frequency refers to the number of times a day over a week that academic and behavior support is needed. Intensity encompasses duration, frequency, and group size (Horner et al., 2015). The more intense a student's need, the more frequently and longer educators have to provide the support. Challenges that face leaders include tracking the effectiveness of interventions, and doing so requires a data system that measures and responds to data across academics, attendance, behavior, and SEL (Lane et al., 2016). Staff needs trained on data tracking systems and how they correlate with student success.

Change Theory: Implementation Stages

Lewin's (1951) three general stages of change are (a) unfreezing, (b) change, and (c) refreezing. The need to change occurs in the unfreezing stage, and it is important to have support from staff. Lewin suggested active staff participation in the change planning process often minimizes resistance to change. Active participation requires communication among leaders to their staff.

Communication is the process of understanding and sharing information, where listening plays an important role (Patton, 2015). Internal communication includes planning, problem solving, and allowing the staff to have a voice. Leaders and staff need communication for MTSS to become a framework within the school sites.

Implementation Science as a Framework for MTSS

I used the implementation science framework to answer the research question about MTSS, as it provides a systematic implementation of MTSS by connecting emergent research to the existing gap in the literature. The implementation science model is a framework that integrates EBPs into practice with fidelity and sustainability (Nilsen, 2015). Implementing and sustaining MTSS allows researchers to frame EBPs and systems change principles (Nilsen, 2015). Implementation science was used to develop the survey, interview protocol, and answer the research question.

MTSS is a system that can be implemented with fidelity via drivers of competency, organization, and leadership. The identified drivers measure how continuation schools and districts implement MTSS EBPs and create support systems for students. Program implementation has stages, including exploration, installation, initial implementation, and final implementation (Pas, Johnson, et al., 2019). The exploration stage involves understanding and acceptance of the intervention and the required implementation of academic supports.

The installation stage involves acquiring resources needed to engage in new ways of implementing innovative strategies effectively. Resources and activities are focused on during the installation stage by developing data collection methods and access to workshops to help staff become familiar with new methods (Freeman et al., 2015). The implementation stage involves a learning curve as organizations adjust and integrate new methods (Freeman et al., 2015). During this stage, the staff implements skills and incorporates them into students' success. This stage is where returning to previous assessments can occur and go backward in education instead of forward thinking.

Transformation can occur at this stage, and administrative supports are needed for staff members to create an EBP in the classrooms.

An EBP requires staff members to collect data and ensure all data correlate with students' goals (Massar & Horner, 2016). Sustainability and high-quality instruction are essential to teachers and administrators because rollover occurs within the school sites.

Implementation Science: Conceptual Framework

I used the implementation science framework to answer the research question about MTSS and explore how educators can use the system in continuation schools. School personnel have focused mainly on developing EBPs to improve educational outcomes for students; when educators implement EBPs, there is often little planning and implementation of the intervention (Banks & Obiakor, 2015). Institute of Educational Sciences (n.d.) indicated that 96% of its funding is spent on creating new interventions and 4% is spent on supports for effective implementation.

Competency Drivers

There are four competency drivers of implementation science: selection, training, coaching, and performance assessment. The selection consists of selecting the right staff for MTSS roles. Roles include coordinator, coach, academic specialist, behavior specialist, and other individuals based on the school site's size and structure (Andreou et al., 2015). Successful implementation of MTSS requires buy-in from all staff members. Professional development of MTSS implementation needs to focus on building EBPs with fidelity and appropriate site level (Adams, 2017). Coaching in MTSS is often successful when the leader is modeling, sharing information through workshops and training to improve the knowledge and understanding of MTSS. The fidelity assessments

evaluate which schools can implement MTSS through evidence. MTSS uses tools to measure self-assessments, walk-through observation tools, and performance evaluation.

Organization Drivers

National Implementation Research Network (2017) identified the organization driver as a support and intervention system. Schools need organizational drivers to establish infrastructure to support MTSS practice and implement change (Freeman et al., 2015). The MTSS problem-solving process uses current data accessible to teachers to make informed decisions. The performance evaluation suggests systems improve the effectiveness of academic interventions.

Data is an effective implementation of MTSS; through the literature review, I found very few data systems explicitly evaluate students' social and behavioral assessments. Existing literature has mainly focused on PBIS as the primary EBP used in California schools (Andreou et al., 2015). PBIS and MTSS rely on data collection to measure program implementation and effectiveness (Andreou et al., 2015). In their study, Andreou et al. (2015) called on school leaders to create schoolwide teams that support MTSS implementation. Continuation schools and specific policies and procedures may need to adjust to implement effective MTSS and support underserved populations.

Leadership Drivers

The leadership driver consists of two types: technical and adaptive (Nilsen, 2015). Technical leaders navigate policy and procedures when problems arise. The second type, adaptive leadership, is related to vision, inspiration, and consensus-building among staff members (Eagle et al., 2015); hence, adaptive leaders must provide directions, support, opportunities, coaching, mentoring, training, and feedback.

Elements of MTSS can signal technical challenges. The leadership of a school administration can change frequently, and adaptive leadership strategies are needed when a school encounters resistance to the implementation of MTSS. Transformational leadership is needed during the implementation stage, and individuals and specific systems require change (Bass, 2005). Consequently, building capacity and infrastructure before implementing MTSS is essential for staff engagement.

For the successful implementation of MTSS in a continuation school, there is a need for more research. There is a literature gap regarding how continuation schools and school leaders implement MTSS and how successful a student can be in a 2-year high school program. Leaders have yet to define areas of improvement when implementing organizational change (Samuels, 2016).

MTSS and EBPs

The MTSS framework has three tiers of support for students. The MTSS framework includes schoolwide, universal screening for academic, social, and behavioral needs, student progress monitoring, and RTIs requiring intervention and data-informed practices (Witzel & Clarke, 2015). As such, this literature review needed to include discussion EBPs of leadership, universal screening, and progress monitoring, as all topics are areas involved in the fidelity of MTSS.

These three concepts, RTI, PBIS, and EBPs, are essential to creating an inclusive, tiered system of academic and behavioral supports for all students (Witzel & Clarke, 2015). Tier 1 of instruction includes all students in the classroom. Tier 2 involves the intensity of instruction, including additional academic or behavioral support based upon the student's assessments. Tier 3 is for students who require the most academic interventions, including afterschool tutoring or one-on-one instruction.

One example might involve a student completing 80% of an assignment and then increasing that percentage over time until they can complete 100%. The common trend is 15% to 20% of students need Tier 2 intervention (Lee & Gage, 2020). Student progress monitoring measures the intervention's effectiveness to successfully learn Tier 1 instruction (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016).

Leadership

Influential leaders help staff through inspiring, guiding, goal setting, conflict resolution, and training in MTSS. The practical implementation of MTSS is to establish collaborative teams at all levels to help students in academics, behavior, and social–emotional learning (Samuels, 2016). The site leader is responsible for providing an environment for staff to understand how to use data to make decisions and be open to their professional development participation to create an effective MTSS system.

Improving Supports

Roles for general and special education teachers supporting MTSS implementation continue to change (Osborne-Lampkin & Folsom, 2017). Teacher, administrator, school leader, and district leader attitudes toward these changing roles will take time, but the rules governing these newer practices are not yet in place (Vogel,

2018). Leadership must support pedagogical adoptions and organizational innovations like MTSS and RTI, providing more focused professional development and sound decision-making processes (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016). Despite existing research, there remains a lack of knowledge about school leaders' role in implementing MTSS (Eagle et al., 2015). Having a leader who consistently trains their staff in best practices of MTSS guarantees adequate implementation of intervention support.

Due to the potential success of MTSS, some 90% of the teachers Jones (2018) surveyed indicated once they implemented MTSS in teachers' classrooms, behavioral issues significantly decreased. Jones (2018) advised school districts should provide PBIS training for teachers on implementing and using MTSS. Teachers' lack of proper MTSS training was a common theme. Furthermore, Jones noted teacher concerns that some children may not respond to behavior modification strategies. Jones found administrators should provide additional training strategies and research to address this issue. Bryk et al. (2015) also recommended administrators should provide additional training strategies for teachers.

Another qualitative research study involved six educators who completed an open-ended survey questionnaire (Choi et al., 2019). In their study, the researchers sought to investigate best practices for RTI within MTSS and revealed that meeting students' needs is a result of effective leadership that establishes communication among the principal, teachers, parents, and other educational professionals. Earlier, Choi et al. (2017) identified the core concept that strong leadership increases the likelihood of successful RTI implementation.

To further support this concept, Choi et al. (2017) investigated a more in-depth understanding of secondary school RTI implementation processes, specifically at the high school level. They based findings on interviews with administrators, and compared these results to the four essential components of RTI set forth by the National Center on Response to Intervention (Freeman et al., 2017). Consistently, according to Fuchs et al. (2015), "One of our most important findings was that schools that demonstrated the highest levels of RTI implementation also demonstrated the highest levels of district and principal leadership" (p. 31). When Fuchs et al. interviewed staff members, the most common response was their principals were fully involved and invested in the entire implementation process.

Summary

The need for this study was to help find a solution to promote faculty collaboration during MTSS implementation at continuation schools. In the classroom, improved scholar outcomes can occur when MTSS is an equitable, tiered, universally designed system of support addressing students' academic, behavioral, and social–emotional well-being in culturally sustaining ways (Hall & Hord, 2011). These essential components are part of leaders' challenges, such as tracking the effectiveness of interventions and improving supports. The focus on school leadership and students within the education system and the context in which the system operates can help leaders find solutions.

Through the literature review, I established school and district personnel across the United States implement MTSS to support and address academic and behavior interventions in all students (Weist et al., 2018). I also identified gaps in existing research

and made strong connections with current and past studies focused on leadership and the collaboration challenges school administrators and teachers identified in this study. Notably, challenges become likely when there is a lack of leadership support, confusion about roles and purpose, inadequate resources, excessive data to manage, and confusion over how to analyze and use information. Rickards and Stitt-Bergh (2016) stated challenges for faculty collaboration could be caused by not creating an environment for open dialogue, communicating regularly, nor having the ability to address shared professional issues.

MTSS is a systematic, continuous-improvement framework in which data-based problem solving and decision making extends across all educational system levels for supporting students (Weist et al., 2018). Based on a California Department of Education (2020) report, MTSS uses high-quality, evidence-based instruction, intervention, and assessment practices to ensure every student receives the appropriate level of support to be successful. MTSS helps schools and districts organize resources by aligning academic standards and behavioral expectations, implemented with fidelity and sustained over time, to enable every child to reach their fullest potential successfully.

Based on the literature review, it remains unclear how well district and school administrators communicate about teachers' challenges with implementing MTSS. Although MTSS encompasses many strategies that may seem daunting, teachers can use some or all MTSS strategies in a classroom (Jez & Wassmer, 2015). MTSS remains a simple program and holds some flexibility; however, a teacher can use its basic and most important features to prevent unwanted behavior (Charlton et al., 2018). These fundamental principles involve giving praise, providing rewards for good behavior, and

giving simple reminders to their students of the expected classroom behaviors; hence, using these strategies supports creating and maintaining a classroom with low behavioral incidents.

Chapter 2 included an evaluation of applicable literature that supported the need for this research and outlined the theoretical framework for the study. The review of the literature pointed to an urgent need to find solutions for better collaboration in MTSS implementation at continuation schools. It is not clear if teachers and administrators communicate effectively about the process; yet, the effectiveness of the MTSS implementation process is contingent on that alignment, thereby justifying this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In Chapter 3, I describe the methods used to explore the research question. Through this study, I attempted to address the problem of difficulty implementing Multi-Tiered Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) in continuation schools. One major obstacle to implementing and sustaining MTSS is the disconnect between what researchers have said about evidence-based programs (EBPs) and what researchers have said about principles of systems change (Fixsen et al., 2013). In other words, the problem school leaders are having in implementing MTSS does not lay with the availability of EBPs; rather, it involves the failure of implementing EBPs effectively.

I attempted to address the communication factor by revisiting the difficulty of implementing MTSS in continuation schools. Communication effectiveness plays an important role in implementation and sustaining MTSS is the disconnect between EBP change principles (Horner et al., 2015). Consequently, examining the issue of communication between school administrators and teachers was accomplished by qualitatively addressing the research question.

Research Method

I designed this study to address school personnel implementing MTSS at their sites. Specific characteristics (i.e., factors) associated with successfully implementing MTSS within continuation school districts are not well known. I inquired about the challenges continuation school personnel face when implementing MTSS through the lens of implementation science. I also investigated the challenges leaders face in continuation schools, which are different from their comprehensive counterparts. I

analyzed demographic differences associated with schools implementing MTSS, and I first reviewed other research methods to find the one that fit the study best.

Mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions and methods of inquiry (Creswell et al., 2007). As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of data collection and analysis and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases of the research process. Collecting, analyzing, and mixing both qualitative and quantitative data into a single study is the focus of mixed methods. The central premise is the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone (Creswell et al., 2007). With its philosophical assumptions, this type of research did not fit the method needed for this study due to the size and focus of the study, nor would it have answered the research question: What do district administrators know about teachers implementing MTSS in continuation schools in northern California?

For traditional quantitative data research, the researcher establishes medians related to questions to distinguish similarities and differences between participant responses and assign coding values to the data (Yin, 2014). The researcher selects questions to run crosstabulations between questions. Finally, the researcher develops a thematic matrix to provide subcategories to answer the research questions; however, in this study, I did not use quantitative research because I did not analyze similarities and differences in responses.

For tradition qualitative research, recorded interviews and data files would be submitted for transcription. The researcher would submit the files to Rev.com and request

the transcription, then would not use audio files for any future or further studies. The data files would not contain the names nor locations of participants, and the researcher would delete these files upon completion; however, traditional qualitative research by itself was not used for this study because in-person observations were not possible due to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Research Design

The design for this study involved qualitative methodology. I conducted individual structured interviews with all volunteers who elected to participate. The interview included Likert-type scale questions, yes/no questions, and open-ended questions. I sent out an email invitation to recruit potential interview participants. To schedule interviews with participants, I contacted voluntary participants and scheduled their individual appointments based on what was convenient for them and me.

To answer the research question, I used qualitative narrative interviews. The qualitative narrative interview explored district and school administrators across continuation high schools in northern California. Data included narrative interviews from two stakeholder groups: district and school administrators. Narrative design is a method of thinking about and studying others' personal experiences. A narrative approach facilitates participants' perceptions of preparedness and focuses on their own lived experiences (Freeman et al., 2017) rather than general attitudes and beliefs toward teachers' challenges in implementing MTSS in continuation schools.

Grounded theory, ethnography, narrative research, historical studies, case studies, and phenomenology are several types of qualitative research designs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, I did not choose grounded theory because it involves a

developed theory that explains a specific phenomenon, which I did not explore in this research. Ethnographic studies are qualitative procedures used to describe, analyze, and interpret a culture's characteristics, which was also not relevant to this study.

The use of phenomenology identifies phenomena and focuses on subjective experiences to understand the structure of those lived experiences (Patton, 2015). I did not explore the lived experiences of the participants. Finally, I did not use case studies because I did not base the research on behavior or participant observations.

A narrative research method was the framework of research methods and techniques chosen for the study. This framework allows researchers to focus on research methods suitable for the subject matter and qualitative research and narrative design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A research study has three components: data collection, measurement, and analysis. The type of research problem an organization faces will determine the research design and data collection methods (Creswell et al., 2007). The design phase of a study determines which tools to use and how to use them. Such an impactful research method kept bias in data analysis at a minimum; this method also increased trust in the accuracy of collected data among the structured interviews from administrators and teachers in the study.

Interviews

Staff interviews were constructed based on principles of implementation science designed by Dr. Fixsen of the National Implementation Research Network (Fixsen et al., 2013). I constructed the interview questions around the implementation science drivers of competency. The interview protocol consisted of response questions and to measure the level of implementation of MTSS in continuation schools (see Appendix C).

As displayed in Table 1, participants' school sizes are shown with their enrollment sizes mainly 50 and under. The largest grouping of school enrollment was a school size of 200 students. The school enrollment size ranged between 50 and 200 students.

Table 1

School Enrollment

School enrollment	%	Number of schools
1–50	20	1
50–100	30	1
100–200	50	1
200–300	0	0
Total	100	3

Participants

I based the purposeful selection of participants upon three factors. First, I determined if participants were employees of a continuation school in northern California. Second, interview participants had to have direct involvement as a site-level leader or a participant in the leadership team with MTSS implemented at their school or district. Third, I had to determine whether or not the participants functioned as an integral part of MTSS planning or implementation team at their site. Teachers and administrators tend to have different beliefs, views, and expectations around work, goals, and careers, and narrative research allowed them to share their experiences (Gaias et al., 2019).

I emailed an invitation to participants from the continuation school districts to participate in the interview. The email included the purpose, the procedures, the potential risks, and contact information (see Appendix A). The email included a description of the

time commitment needed to complete the interview and an informed consent agreement. Participants had to submit the electronic consent agreement before they could participate in the interview. Participants were informed during the consent process that their identities would remain confidential, and participants could withdraw from the interview or discontinue at any time. There were no identifiable risks associated with this study. This study involved no more risk than what participants would encounter in normal school assessment activities.

I used purposive sampling due to the set criteria of participants from the continuation school districts who volunteered and were emailed to participate in the interview (see Appendix A). The email included the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and contact information. The email included a description of the time commitment needed to complete the interview protocol (see Appendix B). I informed participants during the consent process their identities would remain confidential, and participants could withdraw from the interview or discontinue at any time. There were no identifiable risks associated with the study.

Data Analysis Methods

Data were collected from the responses to scripted interview questions and questionnaires to understand the perceptions of MTSS faculty collaboration. I based the field observation notes upon my descriptive notes taken during interviews. Later, I examined responses through coding and thematic analysis.

Establishing the validity of data is critical, and I used a variety of instruments to ensure consistency of the research findings. I used internal statistical tools to calculate the interview results for data analysis. The statistical tool measured internal consistency and

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how well the items correlated when measuring the same construct. I used a coding matrix to ensure codes were consistent. Coding is how researchers define data during analysis (Gibbs, 2009). Coding is the process of identifying a passage in the text or other data items by searching and identifying concepts and finding relations between them. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), codes:

  • represent information researchers expect to find before they conduct the study;

  • represent information researchers did not anticipate finding; and,

  • represent information interesting to researchers, participants, and audiences.

Once I collected the data, the next step was to review the raw data and make sense of all data. In this research, coding the one-on-one interview responses from school leaders and the field observation notes allowed patterns to emerge in the data, identified via pattern matching (Yin, 2014). I used pseudonyms for all participant names and their employment places, and removed all potentially identifying markers from the written documents. Rereading the interview transcripts and reviewing reflective journal memos for each participant helped analyze the data using the aforementioned methodology.

Summary

Using a qualitative research design, I investigated associations with implementation drivers and the implementation of MTSS in continuation California public schools. Qualitative narrative research was the most appropriate design for this study due to the need for generalized findings for the selected populations. An interview process was appropriate because participants provided experiences and practices related to the implementation of MTSS in continuation high schools.

The different but commonly used types of qualitative research methods are (a) in-depth interviews, (b) focus groups, (c) ethnographic research, (d) content analysis, and (e) case study research (Saldaña, 2016). The interviews focused on research questions within the interview protocol. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, the amount of time expected to complete the interview, and the interview results plan; therefore, using this method to collect data and analyze the results allowed me to draw conclusions to answer the research question.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to present the results of the data collected from interviews with six school personnel (i.e., three administrators and three teachers) employed at a continuation high school in northern California. The collected narratives provided insight into their experiences as they developed Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) at the studied school site and helped bridge an explanation of the processes they undertook to understand how important communication is during implementation. The research question guiding this study was: What do district administrators know about teachers implementing MTSS in continuation schools in northern California?

Interviewed Participants

Chapter 4 includes direct quotes and paraphrased versions of participants' stories and background information. I removed any potentially identifying information the reports. The first section of the research findings describes profiles of participants based on interview transcripts, and the second section of the chapter discusses emergent themes from structured interviews held with each participant.

Participant 1

Participant 1 is the assistant superintendent of a medium-sized public school district. The school district has students from Transitional Kindergarten, to 12th grade, to an adult school. Students who have not completed high school and are 18 years or older can attend adult school to receive their high school diplomas. Participant 1 has served as assistant superintendent for 5 years and served 10 years in secondary education. Before joining their current district, they had prior educational leadership experience at other

school districts. Participant 1 started their career as a high school English teacher, where they gained valuable connections to mentors to help introduce them to the administrative field and various projects. Participant 1 transitioned to the assistant principal role and spent 3 years developing the International Baccalaureate program for their main comprehensive high school. Participant 1 contributes to national school publications and has been active in national organizations outside of the studied school district.

Participant 2

Participant 2 is the continuation high school principal for a medium-sized school district. The school district has students from ninth to 12th grade and an adult school. Participant 2 has been in their role for over 6 years. Participant 2 had prior professional experience in law before entering secondary education. Participant 2's industry skills in understanding low socioeconomic families and people of color have easily transferred to secondary education, making them valuable to their school, especially during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Participant 2 is active on multiple boards and high school consortiums outside of the school district, and they plan to hold leadership roles in some of those boards.

Participant 3

Participant 3 is a continuation high school principal of a large school district. The school district students are from Transitional Kindergarten to 12th grade and an adult school. Participant 3 has been a school principal for over 3 years and an educator for 8 years in secondary education. Participant 3 started getting involved in teaching matters and advocating for students early in their career. After a short successful period, they transitioned to administrative responsibilities and then began working on educational

matters at the high school level. Participant 3 also has secondary educational experience at the international level. Participant 3 brings experience in change management and a keen sense for dealing with uncertainty to their principal role.

Participant 4

Participant 4 holds a teaching position in a medium-sized public school district. Participant 4's career has progressed across several teaching positions from student support to department head. Participant 4 has been in their role for over 28 years. Their career trajectory has provided them deep institutional knowledge of the school district. Participant 4 is an advocate for collaboration and broad engagement when discussing challenging educational questions and change. They hold membership in different external educational boards as a representative for their school district.

Participant 5

Participant 5 holds a teaching position in a medium-sized school district. They have been in their role for over 12 years. Their career has progressed across several teaching positions, from classified teacher's aide to certificated classroom teacher. Their career has provided them deep institutional knowledge of operations in their school district. Participant 5 advocates for collaboration and broad engagement strategies when discussing how to assist students who perform below grade level.

Participant 6

Participant 6 holds a teaching position in a large school district. They have been in their role for over 19 years. Their career has progressed across several teaching positions, from elementary teacher, to comprehensive high school teacher, to continuation high school teacher. Their career trajectory between several different school

districts has provided their deep institutional knowledge and strategies to work with students from all levels and backgrounds. Participant 6 advocates for collaboration and engagement strategies when discussing how to assist students who perform below grade level.

Presentation of Findings

Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggested the researcher collect artifacts from the field (e.g., documents) to provide more context to the stories in narrative research. Documents I collected and reviewed provided further insight into each interviewee's location, diversity of the studied school district, and organizational structure to offer a deeper context to answer the research question. I collected background information on each interviewee (e.g., positions, titles, and education history) via searches on their school districts' public websites. I also collected organization information, such as organizational charts and profile information, through public web searches on each interviewee's school district. I organized and analyzed these documents and related information to understand each interviewee's location, the structure of the employee and supervisory hierarchy within their organization, and the diversity composition of their district office, board of education, and continuation school personnel.

Two participants' organizations did not have an organizational chart schematic available on their website; I was able to navigate those schools' websites to obtain more information within these functional areas, but an overall hierarchical schematic was not available. The other three participants' organizations did make their organizational schematics available to the public. Their schematics illustrated three hierarchical levels and listed unit areas within these levels, which presented a flatter, more organic

organizational structure versus a tall, silo-type structure detailing many levels. Table 2

shows the organizational structure schematic type of each participant's institution.

Table 2

Organizational Chart Schematic Type

Organizational chart	*n*	*%*
Not available	2	30
1-level schematic	0	0
2-level schematic	0	0
3-level schematic	4	70
4 or more levels schematic	0	0

Note. *n* = number of schools.

Two of the three school districts' offices were represented with an equal number

or majority of diverse people, as shown in Table 3. One school district did not have this

information publicly available on its website.

Table 3

Diversity Profile for District Offices

Organizational chart	*n*	*%*
Diverse	2	66
Not available	1	34

When looking at member profiles of participants in Table 4, all three school

districts comprise elected community members, faculty, students, and classified

representatives who have a right to attend and express their opinions to their respective

school site council. Two school districts also identify alternates for each of their

organizational representatives.

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Table 4

School Site Council Per School Site

Representation type	N	%
Community representation	3	100
Teacher representation	3	100
Student representation	3	100
Classified representation	3	100
Alternate representation	3	100
Information not available	0	0

I analyzed additional interviewee information regarding years of experience within and outside of secondary education based on the document review and interview transcripts. Three educators have worked in secondary education and/or education in various capacities for over 10 years, as seen in Table 5 and Table 6, respectively.

Table 5

Participants' Years of Secondary Education

Years of secondary education	n	%
0–5	0	0
6–10	3	74.5
11–15	1	8.5
16–20	1	8.5
21–25	0	0
26–30	1	8.5

Table 6

Participants' Years in Education

Participant pseudonym	Job title	# of years in secondary education	Multiple positions	Multiple job titles
Participant 1	Assistant superintendent	10	Yes	Yes
Participant 2	Principal	6	Yes	Yes
Participant 3	Principal	8	Yes	Yes
Participant 4	Teacher	28	Yes	Yes
Participant 5	Teacher	12	Yes	Yes
Participant 6	Teacher	19	Yes	Yes

All six teachers and administrators are members of the representative school site councils for their respective school sites. They all have experience on other educational boards or teams, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7

External Representation and Other School District Experience

Participant pseudonym	Member of external board or team	Other school district experience
Participant 1	Yes	No
Participant 2	Yes	Yes
Participant 3	Yes	Yes
Participant 4	Yes	Yes
Participant 5	Yes	Yes
Participant 6	Yes	Yes

Findings from the document review included: (a) All participants are members of the school site council representing their school or district site, and (b) all have had experience as teachers. Except for Participant 2, the five other participants have held multiple positions and titles in secondary education for over 10 years. Except for Participant 5, whose school district did not have information publicly available, the other

districts have either an equal or majority composition of racial diversity representative within their district. These three school districts also have a faculty member, community member, staff member, and student representative sitting as elected members to serve as voices on their school site councils.

Themes

I sought to explore what enables teachers to be successful with MTSS when provided the support of administrators. I found the answer to the research question after reviewing myriad documents and listening to participants' stories about the communication and needs to be addressed by the teachers and administrators. The following themes developed from the interview transcripts based on the research question: What do district administrators know about teachers implementing MTSS in continuation schools in northern California?

Each theme highlighted a commitment to growth that develops a leader personally and professionally. Successful leadership development involves much more focus on the self; the key is how leadership is enabled within a school district structure. Table 8 shows the categories, themes, and comments made by the interviewed administrators and teachers regarding the uniqueness in their stories that may have yielded positive or negative influence on their MTSS implementation experiences.

Table 8

Categories and Themes

Category	Themes	Examples	Positive communication and strategies	Negative communication and strategies
Identity/location	Open-Minded	Willing to take opportunities for leadership roles when they have come up (Participant 1 & 2) Decision to be a leader have opened up other opportunities (Participant 6) Being naive and open to opportunities; opportunities provide experience (Participant 4) You must open up for leadership roles and ways to advocate for students (Participant 1) I didn't ask others questions, I've just jumped all over it to create ways to help students (Participant 3 & 5)	Willing to take opportunities; being naive; being open; explore what can be done; inspired by someone	Lack of guidance from district administrators; responsibility to the students

Category	Themes	Examples	Positive communication and strategies	Negative communication and strategies
	Self-Confidence	Power to define yourself through educating the students (Participant 2)	Internally encouraged; can let go easily; challenging and meaningful work; listened to; asking for help; reflection; institutional knowledge	Tough environment; political rules and other forms of hierarchy apply; lack of support from administrators; can't get anything done when given too many directions; nervous; insecure; conflicted
		Trust in yourself, your skills, and speak up when strategies are not working; Say what you know (Participant 4)	Engaged in different ways; awareness; peer support; educational impact; effect change; balance; new challenges; helping others	Feeling like you are not heard; constantly at a crossroads; needing energy and curiosity; not feeling ready; overthinking
		Need time to develop confidence and see yourself as a leader; Anyone can be a leader (Participant 1 & 3)		
		You change while in you are in the position; Grow into a new position; Lack of communication remains (Participant 2 & 4)		
		Meaningful work (Participant 6)		
		I am recognized for potential and was encouraged to pursue administration (Participant 1)		
	Motivation	Doing things that gives me energy and joy (Participant 2)		

Category	Themes	Examples	Positive communication and strategies	Negative communication and strategies
		Predecessor encouragement (Participant 4)		
Difference	Change	Watching student success due to changes in methods (Participant 6)	Applying skills; create a positive work environment; decision- making; spousal encouragement; school site council contribution; interesting work; encourages participation; topic in the leadership group; frequent discussion	Increasing responsibilities; uncomfortable conversations; lack of experience and preparedness; lack of strategy development; disruptive change and relationships among administrators and teachers; lack of big picture for the school site; demanding and tiring work; difficult decisions
		Graduating students' pressure (Participant 4)		
		A lot of work (Participant 4)		
		Too much responsibility (Participant 6)		
		Many issues all of the time (Participant 5)		
		Applying strategies (Participant 3)		
	Communication	Making it a topic for administrators and teachers (Participant 1)		It's difficult; easily misinterpreted; rarely reaches everyone; language matters

Category	Themes	Examples	Positive communication and strategies	Negative communication and strategies
		Use different ways to communication challenges with MTSS (Participant 2 & 6)		
		2-way communications from administration and teachers (Participant 3 & 4)		
		Don't assume people know the strategies or understand MTSS (Participant 6)		
		Easily misunderstood needs from administration and teachers (Participant 4)		
Oppression	Development strategies	Combination of leadership from several districts or teacher to administrator (Participant 4 & 5)	Participated in national, and district leadership courses for MTSS Strategies; mixture of content with integrated perspective; professional development	Still learning; Trainings do not have follow throughs; need to develop tech savvy; Teacher and administrators have different strategy preferences; lack of knowledge about MTSS
		MTSS training for Teachers and administrators (Participant 3 & 4); MTSS program strategies spread over 1 year (Participant 3)		

Category	Themes	Examples	Positive communication and strategies	Negative communication and strategies
		MTSS training on bias; strategy techniques (Participant 5); Integrate student perspective (Participant 2)		
		Administrators lack knowledge about MTSS in continuation high schools (Participant 1)		
Power	Communication Styles	Manage to get coworkers to grow and develop new MTSS strategies for underserved students (Participant 2)	Helping others strategize; Teachers, administrators continue to grow; achieve student goals through helping others	Bad taste; people did not know me; pace is faster, things are changing, the politics are unpredictable, changing school administrators or teachers
		Making sure that teachers working thrive (Participant 5)		
		Lead through others, collectively student oriented (Participant 3)		
		Members of leadership serve as mentors to others in MTSS (Participant 3)		
		Manage disruptive change (Participant 1)		

Category	Themes	Examples	Positive communication and strategies	Negative communication and strategies
	Support	Lonely at the top (Participant 1 & 2)	Leadership and peer support occasionally; safely discuss issues at large with MTSS; people know your role in MTSS; exciting strategies; regional collaborations; safety net; collective effort to help students graduate	Lonely at the top; nobody to talk to about MTSS struggles in schools; no other stories or narratives about successful MTSS continuation schools; no guidance or continuity
		Administrative coaches, safely discuss MTSS topics (Participant 6)	Given trust to develop MTSS plan; does not function in a hierarchy; having opportunities to create strategies; involved in the educational questions of the community; goal collaboration; informal team discussions for strategies; shared decision making	Administrators lack the whole picture; teachers get lost; lack of support from administrators; role of teachers versus administrator; skewed perspective; not enough contact with other schools and their MTSS strategies
		Regional exposure to MTSS strategies		
		Participation on school site council; (Participant 2, 3, & 4)		
		Network - national, external, personal (All Participants)		
Advice	Take Action	See what needs to be done to get to MTSS streamlined (Participant 5)	Visible MTSS platform; take the opportunities; speak up; don't wait	

Category	Themes	Examples	Positive communication and strategies	Negative communication and strategies
		Make sure you are seen, be visible in the MTSS program at your site (Participant 1 & 2)		
		Speak up for yourself (Participant 3)		
		Take the opportunities, ask for help with strategies (Participant 4)		
	Ask for mentors and coaches	Ask for advice when MTSS strategies are not working (Participant 1)	Change mentors and coaches often; discuss problems, ask for advice; communicate challenges safely	It degrades; start to have the same conversation that leads nowhere; they don't challenge you in a new way and are convinced one way that MTSS works
		Someone to push you forward (Participant 3)		
		Mentor support in safe setting (Participant 1)		
		Many different mentors in different positions (Participant 2)		
		Principals have been mentors (Participant 6)		
		Mentors help discuss problems, provide advice (Participant 3)		
		Help with personal reflection (Participant 1)		

Identity/Location Theme 1: Open-Minded

The importance of being open-minded about MTSS strategies and collaboration

was a common theme among all six interviewed participants. All six mentioned having to

be open to opportunities and possibilities presented in life and being willing to take these

opportunities on to help bridge communication gaps between teachers and administrators.

> And then you can deviate from that plan if you feel like it. And it's very, it's important to think that I can deviate. Not being too focused, you have to open up for life, and I would have never dreamed I would find my way to the district office as an assistant superintendent. (Participant 1)

> I realized that students were leaving my classroom junior year because they fell behind in classes. These kids were my favorite, they had personality and were fun. I knew if the opportunity came, I wanted to be their mentor and principal. Opportunity knocked, and I took the plunge. (Participant 2)

> My 1st year teaching was an accidental placement at the continuation school. It was what I call, uh, a happy accident. Eventually, the principal retired and I applied for the job and got it! (Participant 3)

> Um, but unplanned to teach in the continuation school, since I hadn't had experience as a goal for my career or something like that. It was just opportunity that opened up, so I decided to apply for the transfer to teach English and I got it. (Participant 4)

> When I have had opportunities to transfer out of the main high schools to the continuation schools, I have been naive enough to just say, "no thank you, but I realized that helping the kids is much more interesting." (Participant 5)

> I don't know if it was a plan for me to become a teacher. It was more that, uh, I have always taken the easy way in school and in my first job as a teacher. The possibilities, uh, that have come up from teaching at the comprehensive high school was to transition to the continuation high school. (Participant 6)

All six administrators and teachers mentioned not setting a goal to have a role in

continuation high schools. Seemingly, their experiences with others have influenced their

ability to be open-minded and embrace their roles. Existing literature on MTSS has often

discussed the different types of barriers administrators and teachers can encounter; those

included are often self-imposed and hinder exploring ways to communicate among each

other to help students be successful (Bauch, 2001). Teachers need to be able to see

themselves as successful in their roles. Having role models, such as administrators, can

help inspire a sense of hope for success and enable willingness to try to bridge

communication gaps during the collaboration of MTSS.

> I have several administrators that I looked up to or . . . inspire me in different ways to help students. (Participant 2)

> Other administrators are mentors for me. (Participant 3)

> One teacher once said to me, if I don't understand how to help students succeed, then I need to learn so I can help them, so I am trying to do that. (Participant 4)

> We have a wonderful, wonderful principal . . . really a role model and good person. (Participant 5)

As participants stated, having a role model or mentor knowledgeable of MTSS can help

any administrator or teacher understand and be more conscious of what it would take to

be a successful communicator.

Identity/Location Theme 2: Self-Confidence

In addition to having an open mind about communicating among administrators

and teachers, participants all indicated self-confidence was a key factor in their

experiences. All participants discussed the process of trying to create an open,

communicative environment.

> The hardest one [challenge] was to decide to become an assistant superintendent and become a leader for those you've worked with . . . I think the hardest is to change perspectives that you should be a leader for those people that, before, were working together with and knowing that communication among the teachers needs to be better. And that, that's a change. I think that's hard. (Participant 1)

> Sometimes you forget where you came from as a principal. You get lost in the politics and not realize that you fall into the same trap of not listening to teachers

when they ask for help. It takes guts to come and tell your boss you need to have support in the classroom. (Participant 2)

It's difficult to, first, be a part of a small school environment. And then being a principal for the same school. To move out of the teaching position to a higher level and being the one who is now their supervisor and try to communicate the needs of the teachers takes self-confidence. (Participant 3)

Trying to communicate needs and getting frustrated because it seems you're not heard, but you have to keep going back until someone hears you. Self-confidence and communication is what I push for to help students do well. (Participant 4)

We had many meetings that felt like no one was listening when we said we needed more support in classrooms. You would think that, at a smaller school, there would be more teacher support, but it wasn't the case. Being able to have confidence to speak out for needs was hard, but I'm very happy I did. (Participant 5)

You are leaving the big school to go to a smaller school, knowing that the school you left failed the kids somehow and you need to help them. I felt like I was becoming somebody else that was not being heard because I was struggling in getting kids to learn. It takes a while to learn a school's new norms. (Participant 6)

All participants expressed having the opportunity to grow and change the ways communication can occur while in any position. In the beginning, teachers may not feel as though they are heard but then realize small wins are occurring; when this realization happens, confidence in the role of administrator or teacher grows.

I don't know, I think that being at the district office can skew things . . . I don't know if I'm getting the full view of what the principals and teachers need for MTSS. I like being on the small teams because it helps to hear their struggles and try to help, but it's hard. (Participant 1)

If you don't feel like you can talk to your administrators from the very beginning, then telling us what you need will be hard . . . every time you open a door to have conversations, you do not have the experience because you haven't done it before; of course it's hard to tell your administrator that. But I am trying hard to learn what my teachers need and how to support them with the MTSS strategies. (Participant 2)

I get wrapped up in putting out fires all day that I forget how hard it was as a teacher to communicate needs to your boss . . . but I realize it takes confidence to

say what you need. I try every day to tell my teachers that I want to know their struggles . . . it's hard to get people to talk sometimes. (Participant 3)

I got more self-confident when I see [*sic*] the help I can give the kids. You, you get self-confident and, and trust in yourself that you can convince kids that school is a good thing. Even if there are things that feel impossible to talk about with administrations, you get past it and you get more self-confident. (Participant 4)

Everyone learns to talk, but communicating needs is hard if you don't feel valued. Working with kids that are almost adults but can only read at the sixth-grade level is scary. Telling your administration that "I need help" is hard, but it helped me grow as a communicator. (Participant 5)

You start maybe to look at yourself in another way, too, being more confident and not frustrated . . . at the beginning, I didn't feel like anyone was listening, my needs for learning MTSS was falling on deaf ears . . . but when people see you trying to make change, you grow into the position and people will support you. . . . And so it's an, it's a changing process, I think. You know, growing into a position. (Participant 6)

Participants referenced traditional teaching methods and did not need to expect someone to know everything or already have MTSS strategies perfected before communicating a new opportunity. Teachers should not be afraid to say they need help with MTSS and have more trust in themselves and their abilities while in their positions.

Expectations to have students succeed is different at every site, but with continuation, we need to get the students to graduate and explore as many strategies using MTSS as possible. (Participant 1)

Being able to trust the skills of my teachers is important. Teachers who have not had help with MTSS in the past and have given up tend to be more shy and not saying, speaking up for themselves. So if you should advise a young teacher, it is to say that you trust in yourself and we are trying our best to help. (Participant 2)

It's hard to engage with every teacher daily. I try, but I had different ideas on MTSS than others and I am trying to have a question box that teachers can ask and I answer during meetings. It's been working well so far. (Participant 3)

There is so much knowledge among teachers that you can just ask for help. I think a lot of teachers think that I should know this instead of asking. (Participant 4)

Don't be afraid. Don't think that you should know everything when you are trying strategies that are new. You don't need to, you don't have to do it all perfect from

Day 1. There is the possibility to develop and not deliver it correct the first time. (Participant 5)

Experience is learned, and how to ask for help is hard as an adult. There is something that life provides us with, a chance to ask questions and help be better at my job in helping kids succeed. (Participant 6)

Difference Theme 1: Motivation

Each interviewee presented slightly different motivations for implementing MTSS in continuation schools; however, what they each had in common was their motivations were not power related; they were far more aligned with helping students succeed.

It's important for the schools to have goals within MTSS. I think it's very interesting to be close to where decisions are made for schools, but more interesting because this group of students are considered underserved and at risk. My role is to make decisions and be part of the discussion going on for helping MTSS succeed in continuation schools. (Participant 1)

Systems, schools are made up of so many, and some work and some don't. I'm motivated by what works and can keep kids in school so they can graduate. But it is hard to do. (Participant 2)

The top can be lonely, and my motivation is my teachers and students. As much as we "have to" do MTSS, it is hard. If a strategy works, we use it, if it doesn't, we try something else. (Participant 3)

I have influence on students and being able to help them be successful is my motivation. (Participant 4)

Working with the underserved or, as they say, disproportionate students, is my motivation. MTSS can be hard to understand and use in a school where you only see students for a year. But if I can help them, then I know I'm doing my job well. (Participant 5)

I am solution-driven as a person. And I felt that working in education was really meaningful to see students succeed . . . I like being a part of something that's important but also is challenging because the students need to make up 1 or 2 years of high school in 1 school year. It's hard for everyone. (Participant 6)

Except for Participant 2, everyone started in education. The majority of the participants

indicated they were encouraged by various people—including predecessors and other

leaders—to continue their career development and move up in the school district.

> My mom encouraged me to start in education and then move up. I learned to trust myself and trusted my knowledge and that's helped me get to where I am. (Participant 1)

> The first time I applied for the principal position was because my principal retired. Yeah, he, he said that he had thought that I should apply for this position. (Participant 3)

> I remember being an average student and I never thought of a career in teaching. Once I started and discovered continuation school, I knew it was my calling, and I am motivated by my colleagues. (Participant 4)

> Encouraging me was the other teachers that I worked with, and I thought if that is an opportunity that you're asked to apply for, then I should . . . I thanked the other teachers very much for pushing me. (Participant 5)

> I was encouraged by my principal that, if I wanted to make a big impact, to teach at the continuation high school to help students like I was in school. It was a big motivator. (Participant 6)

Performance evaluations provide an opportunity for supervisors to provide career

direction within the school district. Participant 2 specifically called out their supervisor,

who made it easier for them to progress into a leadership position, noting, "Seeing the

potential and giving me the opportunities, and they encouraged me to pursue the

administrative credential in leadership. I think they made a path easier for me by

mentoring me."

Difference Theme 2: Change

MTSS development allowed interviewees the opportunity to take on interesting

work and apply their implementation skills; they also discussed how their responsibilities

have changed as they progressed into their leadership positions. Participant 1, Participant

2, and Participant 5 each noted the impact communication among teachers and

administrators when implementing MTSS in classrooms can have on students.

> "Change" is such a subjective word. It implies something will occur, but will it do good or will it harm? Changes within our district MTSS have brought a positive tone, but the continuation school struggles to fit the whole mold. I realized that after the staff told me that change is good, but their students' needs are higher and need more support, I realized I am in a position to change an outlook on a school through MTSS. (Participant 1)

> Before I became a principal, it was easy as a teacher to confide in another colleague of the struggles it was to advance kids in class content. As a principal it is hard to get the teachers to tell me what their needs are to help them with MTSS. (Participant 2)

> I wish I had more opportunities to pursue workshops to help me create a plan to help the Tier 2 and Tier 3 students. I say this because as a department head in a new leadership position, I am able to point out the needs of my department easier than when I was a teacher. (Participant 5)

All respondents indicated an increased workload, including the type of tasks and decision

making, was a significant change in their work at a continuation school.

> I have more and more responsibility as an assistant superintendent . . . you have to be able to make decisions both uncomfortable for yourself and your schools. It's challenging . . . the pace is fast, things are changing, the politics are unpredictable, and teachers need to be trained better in MTSS. (Participant 1)

> I have to deal with teachers with mood swings and some are more demanding than others . . . there was a lot of conflict within my staff when I started as principal. . . . There are so many issues all the time, and then MTSS was another layer that was hard to implement because the kids kept coming and going like a revolving door. (Participant 2)

> The complaints I get are from the vocal teachers that want MTSS to be easy and I often hear we are not listening to them, yet we are. Change doesn't occur overnight, and we are all trying our best, but the students are high risk and we are trying strategies to keep them in school. But it's hard. (Participant 3)

> I'm vocal when it comes to helping my students, but the workload for MTSS is high; it's like having all kids on an IEP [Individual Education Plan]. It's a lot of paperwork that goes nowhere—it's frustrating not to see kids progress, we need a better way to do things. (Participant 4)

It's more work at the beginning and end of the school year. We never know who our kids are until they show up and then they trickle in over the year because they are sent from the comprehensive schools. So I am always revising my MTSS tiers and it's exhausting; there have to be an easier way to help kids. (Participant 5)

I think I'm working a lot more than when I was at the comprehensive schools . . . it's a lot of work all the time . . . it's also a bit frustrating because it's a lot of scaffolding for each student, because they are missing 1 or 2 years of high school . . . and they all have a personal story, which is also hard to grasp. The administration wants us to fill out forms as they move from Tier 3 to Tier 2 and what we have done to help them academically. It's a lot of paperwork. (Participant 6)

Participant 1 indicated it was important to have held different positions in the school district because it provided knowledge for questions discussed about MTSS and how it differed among schools. This diverse experience also provides an opportunity to gain trust with others by understanding various implementation measures at different schools. It was notably frustrating, however, because those at Participant 1's school site have not always disclosed their needs.

The other five interviewees all mentioned reflecting on various strategies to learn how to use MTSS for a short period for very transient students. Reflections serve as a way to learn more about one's self and how to improve interactions with students. When working with students at different tier levels, the realization of when to ask for help can also occur during this reflection process.

It [reflection] means reflecting on the role, your role as a leader. It means thinking about, how could I do better? To put it simply, how could I do better as a leader? (Participant 1)

I reflect on how can I reach the students when it's like a revolving door of students; am I serving them the best I can? Does MTSS help or hinder? (Participant 2)

I have learned to ask for help with students through reflection. I think that I have become a better educator because of it. (Participant 4)

I reflect on what I'm doing, how I'm doing it, why I'm doing it, and are my students successful. (Participant 5)

I can get help to reflect on my teaching strategies . . . it is important to be aware of what the Tier 2 and 3 students need. (Participant 6)

Oppression Theme 1: Communication

MTSS is a systematic, continuous-improvement framework in which educators practice data-based problem solving and decision making across all educational system levels for supporting students (Lacireno-Paquet & Reedy, 2015). Three participants—Participant 2, Participant 5, and Participant 6—commented on problem solving and decision making at higher levels; often, the school sites themselves do not seem to matter. Participant 2 mentioned they never hear the positive work the continuation school is doing with MTSS in district leadership meetings. Participant 6 stated that MTSS is often left out when discussing students excelling or making progress at districtwide teacher meetings. Participant 5 commented on the tone and perception others have about students who attend continuation schools; namely, how these students come in with insecurities, thereby perpetuating stereotypes. Participant 1, Participant 3, and Participant 4 discussed having MTSS as a common topic in the district meetings.

MTSS is a topic in the districtwide leadership meetings. (Participant 1)

School site council is a place to start so teachers can tell us how they need help with MTSS in their classes. (Participant 3)

If we want to improve MTSS and have the administration understand how we need more guidance to help students, we need to discuss much more than we do, develop more strategies to show this is very interesting and rewarding. (Participant 4)

Participant 6 discussed the value of simple, clear communication to administrators to help take part in forming better ways to help students. By doing so, administrators can better

understand the needs of continuation high school students. Participant 6 also stated districts have a responsibility to get information and be well-informed so students can succeed. With this achievement, communication becomes a two-way responsibility within school districts. This notion was echoed by Participant 1 as well, who stated: "It's [communication] not a one-way street. It will have to be both ways from school site teachers to the principals to district leadership." Two-way communication allows educators to make sure they are on the same page and there is no misunderstanding on how to deliver MTSS to students. This tactic also ensures communication is not filtered, as Participant 1 experienced.

> I tend to hear from the principals and I realize that I need to hear firsthand from the teachers. (Participant 3)

> It is more likely that I am misunderstood, than I am understood by the administrators when I explain how hard it is to implement the MTSS tier system when a student comes to class once a week. (Participant 4)

> If I want to voice how we need help moving students from below-grade-level reading to at level, I want a space to ask. (Participant 5)

> If I only tell my colleagues of how I need resources and help, then it is often filtered to the principal. (Participant 6)

Interviewees discussed the need for more upper leadership, such as principals and superintendents, to be involved in discussions to improve the implementation of MTSS at continuation high schools.

> I have learned that maybe people haven't even heard about how hard it is to move a student academically and emotionally from ninth-grade curriculum to 11th-grade curriculum when they missed all of ninth and 10th grade for various reasons. . . . We have to discuss and advocate through different channels, personal meetings, and if we are lucky, workshops. Teachers tend to be lower in the totem pole and their voice is dismissed by the superintendents sometimes. (Participant 4)

They district office needs to have more information or take more of an interest in continuation schools . . . because you are so involved at your own site, you think that everyone knows about what goes on here. But they don't, so your platforms are districtwide meetings and talk among departments. (Participant 6)

Oppression Theme 2: Development Activities

In this study, all six interviewees indicated having one or more MTSS training workshops as part of their educational journey. Three interviewees discussed districtwide training courses to learn about their team's MTSS planning, strategies, and administrative tasks. Participant 1 mentioned having an administrative workshop available, but teams from their schools were not present, which they stated would have been very useful.

At the district level, we have departments for educational services and student support services and they support us with relevant materials. . . . Not much support for the strategies as an administrator's role. We have leadership training for all the school principals and send them to countywide trainings, but only if they are starting a program. Nothing for developed MTSS schools. (Participant 2)

I've been to a MTSS training and it was useful to know how to set up the program, but not realistic to the needs of 17 and 18-year-old students that are so far behind in school. (Participant 3)

I've been to workshops though teacher professional development. It was motivating and helpful, but the whole team site was unable to attend because the district said they could only send two people from each school. It was OK, but I came back and explained what I learned, but it's more helpful if everyone went. (Participant 4)

I've had MTSS development training at my school site. That was useful getting more knowledge around the students that are tiered. But really, it is hard to have so many students and each of them are Tier 2 or 3 in one class. I lean on my colleagues to help me. (Participant 5)

Lead for MTSS at my site and there was no workshop to tell me what I need to do . . . I asked other teams at other schools. (Participant 6)

All six interviewees agreed on the strategy of administrator and teacher collaboration for MTSS workshops. Participant 5 discussed how the workshops should have a "strategies session." Participant 1 discussed trainings "helps teachers, specifically for their students."

Participant 2 discussed workshop training on bias and noted how educators think they know what strategies to use on Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 students; yet, they lack knowledge on dissemination. Participant 6 mentioned having actual continuation students attend training sessions to help understand where a student is academically, and voiced struggles as to why school has been challenging.

> I think students are needed. They are forced to be part of MTSS without knowing what the teachers are trying to do. I think a combination of student voice, teachers, and administrators can help make MTSS more real. (Participant 3)

> I think administrators from the district office should join the MTSS workshops. It would help them hear from the teachers and how students are progressing or where we need help. (Participant 4)

Participant 1 and Participant 2 said trainings and workshops do work and are most effective over time, but understood that continuation schools only have students for 2 years.

> Workshops are good and the more you go, the better it works over time. But they don't address a fast way to move kids up when you only have them for 2 years. (Participant 3)

> All schools have a leader [for] MTSS, they go to these workshops and trainings, but next year, someone else goes. It's hard when the teachers and the students only stay for 2 years. (Participant 4)

> Workshops are good and the more you go, the better it works over time. But they don't address a fast way to move kids up when you only have them for 2 years. (Participant 5)

> It's hard to go to workshops because you leave your students and sometimes you have a good idea, and then you return and the student you wanted to try out a new strategy has left. It has happened more than once to me and it's frustrating. (Participant 6)

All six participants supported the discussion of whether teachers need to have a workshop or training for MTSS before they work with tiered students. Participant 5 mentioned, "Teachers that come to continuation school often don't have the trainings to work with an

entire class that are low academically." Participant 5 went on to say it is a discussion at their site meetings and MTSS team that a yearly refresher for everyone is needed. Participant 1 also noted, "Administrators lack knowledge of MTSS and how the system works," which presents challenges to the staff and creates conflicts. Participant 2 expressed the importance of MTSS knowledge and having a broad experience of strategies to help students achieve academic success. Participant 4 stated teachers should not have to prioritize MTSS in their workday; in other words, remediation should not become full-time in the classroom. Participant 4 believed it is possible to combine teaching standards and help students learn the skills they lack. Such work should not be a burden to the point where an individual has no other time but to fill out paperwork to tell the administration the student is behind academically when that is the reason continuation high schools exist.

Participant 6 stated workshops have been helpful because more people and more ideas assist with motivation. Participant 2 mentioned administrators often begin to understand the needs of the continuation school, but not enough to get more help. All six respondents referred to workshops as "refresher process," "too formal," or "doesn't apply to my students." Part of the MTSS process for students does not begin until 3 months into the school year, and that is a late opportunity to get students in a routine before winter vacation. Provision of opportunities, especially early in the school year, is beneficial for the students. Participant 5 mentioned having a discussion with students when they begin at the continuation school, explaining how they will help them academically and how MTSS will work for them. Participant 4 echoed the process at their school site and said including administration would help streamline the communication.

> They [students] come to our school angry that they are there, even though they know they failed ninth and 10th grade. The moment many of them come is an uphill battle and they feel forced and frustrated. Explaining to my principal and colleagues that communicating to them that we can help them graduate eases many of them. (Participant 3)

The MTSS process does not seem to be a one-size-fits-all process. Participant 1 talked about honest reflection in a dialogue with their site principal, who stated the employee "should know they can ask for resources." Participant 1 acknowledged, "They seem frustrated and are unsure of how to ask for help." MTSS progress reporting is a districtwide requirement of each school's academic programs. Participant 2 stated there are norms in their MTSS district evaluations on how to spend time, but they lack a system for measuring effectiveness over the long term. Participant 5 mentioned that it is still hard for teachers to feel supported in the MTSS process. Participant 6 said that teachers have annual development talks regarding how they will work with tiered students, but it often does not matriculate to anything indicative of progress. Participant 3 echoed the same sentiment and further noted that everyone needs to be on the same page as a district and as a school site to see progress.

Power Theme 1: Leadership Style

Leaders have a role in influencing teachers' attitudes toward their performance with students (Hooijberg, 2013). In this study, the administrators and teachers interviewed needed to look beyond the cookie-cutter format of MTSS and adapt the needs of students at the continuation school to lead to success.

> You can solve different issues in different ways. To be open, to see how things are done from an administrator's view can help. (Participant 1)

> I know I need to lead as a principal. I try to have shared decision making for the staff when it comes to understanding the needs of the students and staff. (Participant 2)

Leadership is about listening to the teachers and helping them with their classroom needs. . . . And making sure that we're all aligned with MTSS strategies for students so everyone knows what we're trying to do. (Participant 3)

It is hard to juggle everyone trying to be on the same page and then creating a tier program for an individual student and then convincing the administration what you need. (Participant 4)

Having a clear process and getting people with you to help with strategies. . . . You also go back and forth when dealing with admin . . . I'm used to dealing with my colleagues that feel like they are on an island and no one is listening. (Participant 5)

Administrators come and go as fast as the students come and leave the school. Trying to get everyone on the same page is very hard. (Participant 6)

All six interviewees stated their role in MTSS is to help and develop other teachers and administrators. Participant 1 warned against overwhelming the teachers and said the position they are in now is to "help principals create an environment for MTSS to thrive" and to give "time for teachers to plan and develop strategies." Participant 5 indicated, "MTSS is hard, but working with my colleagues can help them develop and grow." Participant 2 commented on being "able to make sure there is a process to refer students to MTSS." They believed a successful leader listens and helps develop teachers. Participant 6 referenced their happiness in helping students succeed, stating, "Once the MTSS team has a plan to work with a student and it is explained to them, they buy in more and thrive." Participant 5 also made similar references by talking about administrators taking responsibility in developing MTSS at their school. They discussed the need at the district level to support "teachers to develop MTSS as a site lead," and noted leadership could be better, perhaps implying more people at the district office level should take more responsibility for the development of MTSS.

Each interviewee indicated helping others in the school with MTSS is an essential part of their position. Participant 4 mentioned mentoring others when they first arrived because the student population is challenging. Participant 5 stated, "Working with colleagues is better, because if you don't, then you often create lessons by yourself." Mentoring others has helped Participant 1 learn, reflect, and relate to their educational journey. They strive to understand what their principal needs, noting, "I have learned how different MTSS is at the continuation school than at the main high schools. It's helped me relate to other site principals and how you lead others."

Participant 5 indicated an interest in mentoring new teachers on campus. They stated, "My education career have been based on survival. . . . Maybe I can share my experiences so it can help teachers not have a tough first couple of years." Participant 6 mentioned that the leadership team of other teachers and administrators serve as mentors for others at their school. They stated, "When I was new, the principal was my mentor . . . he's been an important person and someone I am comfortable talking to."

Continuation schools have changed throughout the years from where pregnant students attend to students who are academically behind in school. Three interviewees commented on this change and the need to manage such a change. Participant 1 mentioned how the complexities of the students' needs have changed and how the "classroom pace is faster, and students fall behind, and teachers struggle to keep up with what the administrators tell them they need documentation for students." Participant 5 commented on the administrator changes that occur every few years and how to manage new guidelines for MTSS in a way they have never experienced before. Participant 2

believed "the lack of knowledge of how to use MTSS for our students" prevents districts from changing the way they gather data.

Power Theme 2: Support

All interviewees described having a variety of support at the site level and district level—from staff support, to help meeting site-level goals, to growing a support network of colleagues to help write academic plans for students. Another form of support includes having a leadership coach or mentor help work through the struggles of Tier 2 and Tier 3 students. Still, Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 3 each noted can be lonely at the top.

> It's a loneliness when you're at the district office . . . it would be good have the time to meet with teachers about MTSS. It is important for me to hear from those working directly with the students. (Participant 1)

> I feel a little bit alone as a school principal . . . I am the only continuation high school in my district, and it is very different than the comprehensive high schools. I sometimes feel like the other principals don't hear our struggles because the students came from their school to us. (Participant 2)

> It's sometimes a very lonely job . . . there are many issues or things I cannot discuss with my colleagues . . . I've had mentors or coaches, but if they have never worked in a continuation high school, they wouldn't know what I am talking about. We have to be better to have support from the administration at the district level. (Participant 3)

Having personal networks and relationships from workshops played an even further role in the leadership development of guiding an MTSS team. These networks, both internal and external, help participants increase their awareness of MTSS issues at other districts and allow them to pass ideas around to help use strategies at their school site.

> Networking is good, but it is keeping up the relationship over time that is hard. (Participant 2)

MTSS is so hard to build without the right set of teachers and support from administrators, so we rely on the teaching staff at our school more than admin, because we will be there longer than they will. (Participant 4)

How should an MTSS work together effectively knowing that students come and go just like the administrators? Having personal relationships with other team leaders at other school districts have helped. (Participant 5)

I find that having a group of teachers that slowly build out strategies for MTSS can help strengthen the program. (Participant 6)

Participants noted the idea of school staff meetings emphasizing having a network of support every school year. Each interviewee referred to their outside experiences as helpful. All six respondents talked about attending workshops to help develop MTSS strategies. Participant 5 talked about their involvement in the regional MTSS board that covers several school districts and the involvement it provides, noting the different ways of thinking and the vast difference between sending a student to a continuation school versus keeping them at the main high schools. Participant 6 talked about peer networking and meeting "people from different schools and discussing with them different problems and how everyone sometimes solves it very differently." The districtwide level provided Participant 1 with "different networks and meeting colleagues who are relying on data and numbers, as opposed to talking to the teachers and the reasons why students struggle in ninth and 10th grade."

Coalition Building Theme: Collaboration

The six interviewees described collaboration as a main coalition-building category, requiring shared responsibility. Collaboration was instrumental for developing trust at the studied school sites and getting opportunities to build a cohesive MTSS program. Interviewees discussed aspects of the school district that enable collaborative opportunities. Participant 1 mentioned specifically collaborative opportunities are still an

area they continue to develop and improve on from their viewpoint as an assistant

superintendent, and others echoed this sentiment.

> Schools should collaborate more with each other and keep it relevant. (Participant 2)

> We have to develop a MTSS strategy for each student . . . I think of it as mapping and how are we going to get students to graduate. Teamwork is where we begin. (Participant 3)

> I try to listen to teachers to see what their challenges are . . . also I regularly visit the classrooms so I can know what is going on. . . . It helps when we have conversations with the teachers so they can tell me what worries them and where they need help. (Participant 4)

> Developing strategies every year can seem repetitive and if often is . . . we try to keep up with new strategies as a team and bring new ideas to the table to be more effective. (Participant 5)

> Having the school more flexible in working with the kids . . . collaboration is important, but finding the time to really work with the kids can be hard. (Participant 6)

Participant 2 talked about being visible or seen by district leadership and having informal

team discussions with the administration. They described visibility as a level playing

field for all team members. Having teachers and administrators engaged by other school

leaders in discussing different ways to help MTSS provided a feeling of trust and having

a voice. In a similar testament, Participant 3 echoed this idea and said that being

collaborative opens up discussions for serving the underserved population at their school,

even though every student came from different comprehensive high schools.

School institutional memory can have a limiting role within school sites trying to

collaborate. Interviewees talked about different elements they believe are important to

acknowledge and address. Participant 1 talked about individual willingness to express

teachers' needs and how school culture plays a role. Participant 6 described challenges at

their school site regarding collaboration with the administration. Participant 6 stated, "I can't get anything done if we don't get the administration to listen and help us," and noted the need to work better together in the school. Interviewees identified confidence-building inclusion as having more administrative participation, engaging different teachers on educational strategies, practicing different types of collaboration, and outlining clear roles and objectives for MTSS teams as an important mechanism for fostering a collaborative and equitable school site.

As a districtwide shift to have MTSS teams develop strategies more equitable for everyone, it is important to know school culture can undermine those efforts. Participant 4 indicated, although their school has made progress, it is far from perfect. They mentioned there are still "negative attitudes to the administration because they don't listen," and people "create their own classroom islands." Participant 2 discussed how progress is "challenged quite a lot." Participant 3 indicated school culture might depend on the discipline area of the school and the distinction between behaviors students act up for or behaviors stemming from not understanding what is going on in the classroom; some students subsequently develop a coping mechanism to leave the class.

> At the Tier 3 meetings, we talk about positives of the student and we include them so they have a voice. It's important they are also in charge of their education so we, as teachers, understand why they dislike school. (Participant 3)

Participant 5 commented, "We want to feel safe," and Participant 6 reiterated this concept along with the need for "feeling safe to create strategies to benefit students." School culture can create an unsafe atmosphere for students but also teachers; examples Participant 6 shared included coworker sabotage, suspicious colleagues, public debate

with a student in class, and internal politics. Participant 1 also commented on challenging

district cultural conditions that express an "inward looking district, versus outward."

Advice Theme 1: Act

When asked what advice they would give to new educators interested in

developing a strong MTSS team, three interviewees said to be involved in the planning

stages of the tier teams. New teachers to the site need to take action in their lesson plans

and ask for help from colleagues, so they do not feel alone.

> You're encouraged to share out what is working with your tiers, and then the team should provide feedback. (Participant 4)

> You have to be part of the tier planning on strategies or someone will tell you what's best for your student, even though you know better than them. (Participant 5)

> It's very important to be part of the planning stages of MTSS. . . . You need to make sure that you are involved. You have to make sure that you have a colleague that can guide you with strategies for the students. (Participant 6)

Both Participant 1 and Participant 2 recommended asking for help and noted speaking up

for students is necessary, which many teachers are not comfortable doing. This advice

was reinforced by Participant 3, who commented, "What makes you successful early in

the career is to ask for help when you need it."

Advice Theme 2: Ask for Mentors

Finally, all six interviewees stated learning MTSS at the continuation school is

different due to the student population and noted having a mentor is important. Mentors

have provided them with advice, encouragement, and a safe setting for discussing student

issues. Participant 6 recommended changing mentors often, stating they have an initial

impact but, after some time, "advice sounds the same."

Make sure you are seen, be visible in the MTSS program at your site, and ask for advice from teachers that have worked with this student population. (Participant 1)

Speak up for yourself and ask for help from your mentor. (Participant 3)

Take the opportunities, ask for help with strategies, and be open to feedback. (Participant 4)

See what needs to be done to get to MTSS streamlined with your mentor. (Participant 5)

Change Theory and Educators' Experiences

I used change theory to help refine the lens used to study the development experiences of educators. Lewin's (1951) change theory has three general stages of change: unfreezing, change, and refreezing. Change theory provides a view of progression, and using this theoretical lens with MTSS can develop desired change and unique aspects of the experiences that enabled change. The intersection of change theory and implementation science has helped surface critical elements that may have otherwise been unnoticed in participants' journeys in implementing MTSS. Collaboration among staff and administrators can identify the MTSS gap for students and provide educational shifts through workshops and training opportunities. Table 9 shows a summary of these intersections.

Table 9

Intersection of Change Theory and Implementation Science

Change theory theme	Implementation science intersection
Identity/location	Identifying the problem and doing nothing versus implementing a solution.
Difference	Educational shifts to support and embrace the different experiences and interest of administrators and teachers.
Oppression	Providing more opportunity for workshops and trainings earlier will help teachers and administrators be on the same page.

Change theory theme	Implementation science intersection
Power	Experience and identity in relation to location and social relations is individual; Individuals become the vehicle for power.
Coalition building	Investing time with those who are important for the development of MTSS and create your safety net.

Change Theory and Location

Participant 1 had encouragement to continue their educational trajectory to the district office, but they came to an intersection of Stage 1 of change theory.

> I had my family when I was a teacher, and I started to think if I move up while they are young, it was going to be difficult. I waited until my youngest went to college and decided it was time to move up the educational ladder and realizing [*sic*] change is necessary. (Participant 1)

The first stage for change theory is the school site needs to see change as necessary (Lewin, 1951). Participant 1 referenced change as necessary, but change for them began with moving up to help change the landscape of MTSS at high levels of the district office. At this stage in their career, they realized MTSS implementation is different at continuation high schools than comprehensive high schools.

Participant 6 also experienced frustration at their school site level in communicating how hard it is for students to receive academic help when everyone seems like they are on their own island. They struggle with the environment and unwritten rules and behaviors allowed within the school culture.

> Working in secondary education has been challenging in the way that it's not only education rules to follow, but unspoken school site culture rules. Everyone is on the MTSS team but no one seemed to have new ideas when I arrived. The big thing was no one talked to the administrators about how to deal with the students. I was new so I didn't want to rock the boat, so I sat in silence. (Participant 6)

Participant 6 described consistently having to navigate the inability to communicate as "tiring," as is beginning to think about improving the communication at their site.

Participant 6's experiences directly relate to coming on as a new teacher. This intersection helps illuminate the challenges and experiences educators have to endure at the site level and how administrators do not often realize what their school sites need for support.

Difference

Participant 2 stated, "I motivate people to do their best and create good teaching strategies. At the same time, do prioritization, which may be a bit hard from [*sic*] some people. My philosophy is that I trust people." This statement speaks to Stage 2 of change theory; once the change is accepted, implementation begins (Lewin, 1951). There need to be people who help, guide, and support other educators in the MTSS development process; however, the implementation science framework refers to difference. Not all educators share the same experiences and interests in education. Forman et al. (2013) suggested it is hard for teachers and administrators to see themselves as communicating effectively; the school environment as a whole may continue to operate in an "island" mentality. Even when trusting them not to, this environment is still inherently wired the wrong way.

As noted earlier, each respondent had different motivations for developing their MTSS strategies. School districts cannot assume teachers know how to teach continuation school students; thus, they must implement appropriate support mechanisms through workshops or trainings.

> It's both the school environment that is negative for the students and the teachers if the assumption is we know what the students are going through in the academic sense . . . but it also depends on the teachers and administrators to be trained to work with the students. (Participant 2)

Uprooting deeply held beliefs within a school district and helping educators remain conscious of MTSS challenges by providing appropriate support structures can help create new ways of thinking and help students succeed.

Participant 3 spoke about knowing oneself and residual effects on colleagues; this sentiment echoed what others said about knowing the power one may hold in a position, such as a school principal, and the need to reflect in the role. Reflection involves also being aware of change theory; not all teachers and administrators will share the same experiences or strategies. School district personnel and upper administrators need to have this level of consciousness so teachers are not blind to the power they may hold and how it impacts others. Participant 4 echoed this view, stating:

> Your words as an administrator have a lot of power, just as I do as a teacher . . . I have to think about and realize how much power I have to shape a student's thinking or a colleague's perception.

This sentiment intersects with change theory and implementation science, affecting how teachers and administrators see the need for change and lack of communication; this obstacle can also make it very hard for teachers to continue to implement MTSS when no one is working together.

Oppression

Participant 5 spoke about having opportunities to support MTSS at their site. Researchers have discussed using MTSS to support all students by addressing academic and behavioral interventions (Lacireno-Paquet & Reedy, 2015). It is hard for teachers and administrators to see the need to communicate. When the same teachers lead MTSS at the site and no progress has been made, others may go with the flow and not want to rock the boat, leaving the strengths of others unrecognized. Power and privilege extend to the

same people, and they continue to operate MTSS as a "have to" program. Teachers need to explore, communicate, and create a plan together (Lane et al., 2011). Participant 4 said more people should have the opportunity for workshops and training to help them see their schools in a different light and grow, rather than be mundane.

> Trying to get workshops and trainings for everyone instead of the same people will let others grow and learn. And having the entire MTSS team go will help the administrators to hear from everyone and hopefully vice-versa. (Participant 4)

Doing so will break the status quo and provide teachers and administrators the opportunity to communicate and leave their internalized oppression and position.

Power

As indicated by change theory, deciding change needs to occur and then to make it happen can rely on shared experiences, and one's experiences can lead to improved communication. Participant 1's experience and identity concerning their location and social relations were, "Change can occur at the site level, but it can occur among teachers and administrators, but you need to feel like someone is really listening to you." Leadership opportunities for educators exist, not limited by the hierarchical thinking of a school district. Having teachers and administrators in the same meetings can create change and challenge the consensus-like structures in certain school districts. The staff culture at Participant 6's school depends on relationships, which makes them feel like an individual—not just another teacher. They feel their experience is valued, which is encouraging to them. This experience is similar to literature focused on other school districts based more on processes and found leadership tends to make all the decisions without teacher voices (Robinson et al., 2013). At Participant 6's institution, individuals

become the voice for power and change within the structures of the school and the MTSS team.

> You can discuss strategies, methods, and how to help a struggling student with colleagues and administration. That is great when we develop lessons for our students. (Participant 6)

Change theory is not about dismantling an old system; it is about growth and opening communication to create a better system (Lewin, 1951). Change facilitates courage to build relationships and have open discussions while bringing in teachers and administrators. In a manner similar to Participant 6's experience, a school district that fosters equitable mentor relationships from the top down can help teachers make sustainable changes to their MTSS teams. These changes enable teachers and administrators to embrace change theory and better understand using the teams' strengths to build on weaknesses.

Existing literature has found communication is key to creating change (Sailor, 2015). Participant 3 discussed how communicating has been important to their career development; their school culture allows voice within meetings and ideas to flow freely and openly. The ability to create trusting relationships with teachers and administrators to help make change possible even permits growth, illustrating when power is decentralized and widespread, it can put teams—such as MTSS—at the forefront of communicating effectively.

Coalition Building

Participant 4 pointed out when considering change at the school site level, it is important to know leaders will be surrounded by both those who will encourage and those who will discourage teachers. This sentiment aligns with literature that found

challenges emerge when there is (a) lack of leadership support, (b) confusion about roles and purpose, (c) inadequate resources, (d) excessive data to manage, and (e) confusion over how to analyze and use information (Ogden & Fixsen, 2014). Participant 4 indicated they understood the lack of leadership and could recognize it. This knowledge may help prevent discouraging comments from the administration, which may influence their teaching ability. Participant 4 described comments that reflective of mockery, such as "Oh, should you do that for a strategy?" They said those comments came from "people who do not know how to interact with our students." They were able to recognize and ignore these power techniques, which allowed them to see how they needed to revise their MTSS strategies and believe it could be achieved. Teachers who do not have such knowledge may not as easily disregard those comments, which can confuse teachers and leave them doubting whether or not they can achieve progress. Participant 4 had people important to them who believed in bringing change though communication.

Participant 3 discussed having a safety net around them consisting of people who know and trust them to make subsequent decisions in the best interest of the school site. Researchers have similarly discussed confusion and roles when implementing MTSS at the site level (Severson et al., 2007). Step 3 of change theory is to refreeze for change to be sustainable over time (Gardner, 2011). Participant 3 works with their staff to ensure teachers sustain the MTSS model over time, as students come and go quickly. In doing so, teachers step outside of their comfort zones, which is uncomfortable for many teachers. Participant 3 mentioned people need to know and trust leaders for buy-in to occur because communication is the key to everything. There is resistance to creating a sound set of strategies to help students succeed, but it can be overcome through

communication and through demonstrating strategies that strengthens the communication bond at the school site.

> I admit I am not the greatest communicator, but I have learned to do it as a leader. I find that staff meetings are smoother and teams are more fluid. (Participant 3)

Communicating, and advocating for change and understanding, helps other teachers to have a voice and express their needs for their students.

Summary

Chapter 4 presented findings from interviews conducted with three administrators and three teachers who have direct contact with continuation high schools and their MTSS programs in northern California. I collected data from each interviewee's school district websites and web searches, including organizational charts and profile information. I also provided a brief description of each interview using pseudonym names to protect the identities of each participant (see Table 6). Themes were developed based on the research question: What do district administrators know about teachers implementing MTSS in continuation schools in northern California?

In the Identity and Location category, all participants indicated they did not originally plan to be in education or work within the continuation high school setting. Being open-minded and willing to take on leadership opportunities with MTSS teams was an important aspect of their educational success. I identified Self-Confidence as a second theme in the Identity and Location category. All six participants indicated the continuation high school setting was very different than the comprehensive high school setting. All of them said communication is an important factor, and more voices should emerge from both sides, including teachers and administrators. When identity and location were considered, it became evident that conditions within the school site can

influence the ability of teachers to find a voice and communicate their needs to administrators for MTSS to be used effectively. School sites should support and embrace new ideas and opportunities, such as workshops and training, and be open to advancing their MTSS programs explicitly directed at continuation high schools.

Two themes, Motivation and Change, emerged within the Difference category. Each interviewee expressed different motives for being part of MTSS teams at their sites. The majority were encouraged to develop their strategies with their teams, and some involved administrators. Different processes within the school site, such as school site councils or districtwide MTSS teams, provided opportunities for teachers and direction and feedback for school sites. The second theme, Change, included negative factors. Each participant commented on how creating strategies for MTSS can be a time-consuming job without a team to help and noted the struggle of different directions given by colleagues and administrators. Having people on multiple teams confuses the teachers and causes frustration on how best to voice their needs to administrators. In interviews, I discussed Reflection to learn more about teacher identity or working with continuation high school students as an administrator.

I concluded there is a need for a new way to communicate needs for MTSS at the site level, and doing so would improve collaboration and mentor others as they work with this population of students. Fostering and rewarding collaborative, communicative behaviors will provide more equity in school responsibilities and trust, such as shared voices. Leadership development as an administrator also involves working with others and guiding them on how to present MTSS to the school site, but also involves recognizing teacher voice is important.

Communication and Development Activities were two themes identified as important in helping MTSS become a stronger system to help students achieve graduation. Within the Communication theme, interviewees indicated the need for more discussion around leadership in their school district and site level and better two-way communications to help make the strategies and development of MTSS equitable for all schools. Interviewees discussed using different ways for communication, including using technology to reach more administrators and holding meetings that include administrators from the school site and the district office.

The Development Activity theme within the Oppression category revolved around different training opportunities, workshops, and in-house professional development seminars that provide useful knowledge and connections for increasing engagement in MTSS. The need to mix content, such as administrator and teacher perspectives, power techniques, and role-playing students, was expressed by all six interviewees. The need for districtwide professional workshops and training was also expressed as an important factor so teachers and administrators understand that needs of a continuation high school are different from comprehensive high schools. Participants noted that mentorship and understanding of MTSS when teachers begin a school year is instrumental in making opportunities available for communication among teachers and administrators. I concluded enabling these opportunities starts with making MTSS training and workshops a priority. Regular discussions within MTSS leadership teams need to occur, thereby enabling more people to have voice at the beginning of a school year so needs are met by offering MTSS training that is more effective and sustainable.

Overall, collaboration within the school district was common among all participants to help them develop a better MTSS system. This collaboration provides trust and visibility to other teachers and administration when it occurs effectively. Most participants talked about how their schools do not function as a whole and noted a need for flexibility and engagement beyond the MTSS structure. Structural mechanisms can be limiting factors for teachers and administrators, but hardwiring shifts in the school district can enable an equitable experience for everyone. I concluded "island teachers" need to be eliminated to develop closer relationships and collaboration across the school site. Administrators, in this case, would be able to view better their role on the school site against the backdrop of the whole school district and the collective efforts needed for MTSS to thrive in the ever-changing landscape of secondary education. Intentionally engaging others in creating strategies, prioritizing communication, and accomplishing engagement in Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 levels within MTSS will help level the playing field for teachers and administrators.

The final thematic category, Advice, revolved around acting. The interviewees advised teachers and administrators not to wait, to take opportunities, and speak up when help is needed. It is hard to implement MTSS in a way equitable for all students at the continuation high school level. All six participants indicated mentors played an important role in their educational and career development. Teachers and administrators should ask for MTSS mentors and be encouraged to change them frequently for new challenges.

Finally, I analyzed change theory and implementation science to help refine the lens to study the needs of implementing MTSS at the continuation high school and the educational experiences of teachers and administrators. The intersection of these two

theories helped surface critical elements in their leadership development journeys that may have otherwise gone unnoticed. This intersection revealed how educators can struggle with communicating what they need to implement MTSS at the teaching and administrator levels. Consistently having to navigate these communication hurdles is tiring for both parties. The environment may continue to operate in a noncommunicative way, even though it occurred in the past, and there is general agreement that, without good communication, the school site may still be hardwired the wrong way and will continue to support the status quo and resist change. It is important that people in positions of power, such as administrators and department heads, realize their words have considerable power and influence. Inability to communicate with one another for students' success can make it very hard for teachers to gain a sense of belonging. When the same people are chosen all the time to lead, others may internalize this behavior as acceptable and as the norms of the school site. Such normalization can make it difficult for other teachers and administrators to speak up; this challenge prevents discovery of ideas and strategies for MTSS that others can recognize.

In the final chapter, Chapter 5, I discuss these emergent themes in greater detail, along with recommendations and implications for practice within school sites and at the district level. I also propose future research in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to present the interpretation of key findings from participant interviews and present recommendations. These recommendations and proposed future research are presented in relation to the purpose of the study, as indicated in Chapter 1; that is, effective communication evidenced when district and local administrators are aware of the status, challenges, and successes of continuation high school teachers in implementing Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). I used a narrative research approach to reveal the stories of six participants as they reflected on their educational journeys. This chapter has five sections: (a) discussion of the findings and conclusions, (b) application of findings and conclusions to the problem statement, (c) application to leadership, (d) recommendations for action, and (e) recommendations for further research.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore what school administrators know about teachers implementing MTSS in continuation schools in northern California. Teachers and administrators are aware of the importance of communicating what is needed to implement MTSS, but there remains communication gaps among them. School district personnel have been slow to change ways of incorporating teachers and administrators in the same discussions to help provide feedback to improve MTSS at their respective school sites. There are challenges in collaboration and communication when implementing MTSS at continuation schools.

Narrative research was selected as the best way to understand teachers' and administrators' views, allowing others to connect with their stories through a discussion

of communication, collaboration, and their educational journeys. This research provided insights on different forms of leadership from administrators and different forms of collaboration among teachers. These findings also lead to new strategies that can help teachers and administrators make greater strides in eliminating communication and collaboration barriers between them to change the culture of secondary education. I used change theory as the primary lens for examining teachers' and administrators' experiences of identity, difference, power, and oppression. I constructed this lens from the tenet of change theory that supports communication as a process of understanding and sharing information; in this regard, listening plays an important role (Patton, 2015). At its foundation, change theory identifies the need for change, creates change, and seeks to substantiate change over time (Lewin, 1951). Change theory can help create community and foster formal and informal interactions and action opportunities for teachers and administrators. Six teachers' and administrators' stories were captured and analyzed to understand how identity, difference, oppression, power, and collaboration influences may have helped or limited them amid creating sustainable MTSS programs at their school sites and the district level.

The research question was: What do district administrators know about teachers implementing MTSS in continuation schools in northern California? Nine themes emerged from interviews and I assigned them into theoretical categories. These themes were described in Chapter 4 (see Table 8). I drew 12 actionable recommendations from the nine emergent themes from the interviews. These recommendations came from this research and were organized by the same theoretical categories used in Chapter 4. Table 10 presents a summary of these categories and recommendations.

Table 10

Categories and Recommendations

Category	Recommendation
Identity	Recommendation 1: Be more aware of the continuation high school needs that are significantly different than comprehensive high schools. The communication and collaboration that teachers and administrators need to be aware of in order to enhance their MTSS programs. Recommendation 2: Increase the number of MTSS workshops and site level trainings to develop strategies to assist students. Involve teachers and administrators in the same space and begin joint conversations.
Difference	Recommendation 3: Take on a renewed focus on leadership by being more involved in MTSS collaboration, development and mentorship of new teachers and administrators to the continuation high school. Recommendation 4: Promote teacher and administrator collaboration and cultivate more leaders for better results providing a more innovative yet equitable way for each side to communicate their MTSS needs. Recommendation 5: Offer mentors to help teachers and administrators reflect on their MTSS leadership roles and learn more about themselves.
Oppression	Recommendation 6: Integrate MTSS discussions and leadership development with the continuation high schools at site level and district level meetings. Recommendation 7: Offer MTSS development activities, workshops, and trainings prior to the school year starting and throughout the year. Include region and state-wide opportunities as well as professional trainings about MTSS, best strategies, administrative best practices, and bias to support continuation high schools.
Power	Recommendation 8: Recognize that leadership development is a social process and eliminate the administrative or teacher only thinking, thus creating an atmosphere of collaboration. Recommendation 9: Offer various support resources to the MTSS teams at site and district level.
Coalition building	Recommendation 10: Be an outward-looking school site and offer more confidence-building opportunities for teachers and administrators for MTSS.
Advice	Recommendation 11: Be open to change at the teacher and administrator level. Recommendation 12: Ask for mentors for the MTSS teams and change them often.

These findings supported the change theory lens that explains teachers and administrators can recognize the need to change and then create connections to best position themselves as participants willing to act. The MTSS teams at the school sites

embraced and promoted conversation and collaboration by including administrators to effect sustainable change. This ideal MTSS team can express their needs in understanding how to implement the best strategies and maintain this success through language, actions, and modeling of such strategies. Together, teachers and administrators can allow differences of expression, definition, and action in authentic ways and can benefit from being distinctive and having the ability to speak out and using support from colleagues.

All respondents expressed that their schools try to function collaboratively, and they have personally witnessed and experienced collaborations with their administrators as they developed their MTSS programs. In some cases, the existing administrators and teachers served as mentors and role models for those beginning as continuation high school teachers. Many respondents cited they were comprehensive high school teachers before moving over to the continuation high school model. I recommend researchers take a closer look at how to adapt change theory over time so new ideas and strategies, along with continued collaboration between teachers and administrators, do not return to preexisting conditions.

In the educational setting, transformational leadership fits into the higher level of needs because it requires a higher level of self-esteem, authenticity, morality, and dignity to perform this kind of leadership (Thomas et al., 2020). Leaders who are motivated in the same way and provide leadership within the school district mirror the performance. Transformational leadership within MTSS focuses on administrators' ability to remain flexible and collaborative with the whole group. This leadership turns the focus away from one individual and endorses everyone's voice by achieving equality. In this regard,

all interviewees articulated their experiences in their positions as leading with openness and solid communication. They each talked about having opportunities to voice concerns of MTSS amid a lack of workshops and training, along with the willingness to take advantage of them when possible. Participant 6 stated, "At first, I didn't think anyone wanted to hear me point out the obvious, then I realized I better, because lack of trainings was not obvious to everyone."

Each interviewee provided comments indicating they were a leader in their MTSS team and chose to be a part of the group to enhance their school site. Their experiences were enabled by having access to build their MTSS program within the school site—and some, at the district level—and this access began by showing support of each other and learning to include administrators in their efforts. The following section includes recommendations within each category and provides a summary discussion of each interpretations.

Application of Findings and Conclusions to the Problem Statement

Each interviewee provided comments indicating they were a leader in their MTSS team and chose to be a part of the group to enhance their school site. Their experiences were enabled by having access to build their MTSS programs within the school site or district level. They began by being supported by each other and learning to include administrators within the school district. The following section includes recommendations within each category and provides a summary discussion of interpretations in each.

Identity/Location Category

Two themes emerged from the Identity/Location category: Open Mind and Self-Confidence toward leading and serving as part of the MTSS team. Most interviewees discussed their willingness to take on opportunities and have been encouraged by other colleagues in their respective school districts to take on more of a leadership role. Participant 1 mentioned "not knowing everything," and realized early in their teaching career that new opportunities would give the experience needed to understand how school sites work. They also noted having experience was a prerequisite to being an assistant superintendent. Participant 1 stated, "There was a mentor when I was first beginning my teaching career looking at me and saying, 'You don't have the experience today, but you will get it as the years pass.'" They said this advice was something they shared with other teachers they mentored.

Participant 2 talked about their "individual willingness to take on new challenges with MTSS." When they had an opportunity to lead the group, they embraced the opportunity. Participant 6 talked about "being open," "be willing to step up," and "learning through modeling and mentoring." Participant 5 said they "took opportunities to be on the MTSS team when it came up." Participant 5's willingness and courage to take on new opportunities in the school site by becoming part of the MTSS team—even without having the experience of being at the forefront of a newly implemented system for students—helped them understand how this system needs to improve. This opportunity allowed them to think about the whole education system. Each interviewee said they began their educational careers not realizing they would end up at continuation high school, but the willingness to be open-minded and have the courage to try a new

opportunity, even without experience, was essential to helping themselves succeed for the betterment of their school site.

All participants identified one key barrier that was a difficult hurdle for them to overcome: the decision to leave a comprehensive high school and continue their educational careers with a continuation high school. Leaving their students and their mentors, the traditional environment, and their colleagues were difficult. Existing literature has shown researchers have sought to investigate best practices for Response to Intervention (RTI) within MTSS. Meeting the needs of all students is a result of effective leadership establishing communication among administrators, teachers, parents, and other educational professionals. Schools that foster knowledge flow and embrace relationships that help break down communication barriers, however, allow teachers to provide strategies with the help of effective leadership from administrators.

School personnel can provide training and workshops and can become model schools for MTSS. Participant 4 mentioned "providing structured trainings can help," and Participant 3 mentioned they have a "teacher MTSS support structure." Participant 1 discussed their continued efforts in a "district-level structure for MTSS support to schools" and mentioned the need for flexibility. In contrast, Participant 5 referenced a supportive administrator with "collaboration" and "enhanced communication." It was evident from the five interviewees with a long history in secondary education that their leadership development within the MTSS team happened because the school environment was open to supporting them.

The interviewees articulated courage as a factor that helped them gain the self-confidence needed to speak up that they needed improved communication from

administrators and the ability to state their needs. The environmental conditions, not their

position in their schools, encouraged the MTSS team members to speak up and take risks

outside of their comfort zones to help them feel heard. Through these conditions, they

had a sense of being heard and supported by their colleagues when they needed guidance

on MTSS. Participant 5 mentioned having to "realize that without speaking up and telling

the administrators that the MTSS methods used at the comprehensive high schools are

not the same for the continuation high school students." Participant 3 mentioned gaining

self-confidence by "speaking up and saying what they need from their administrators."

Participant 2 stated, "It takes confidence to go against the grain and speak your mind,"

and how through "taking the risk, my other colleagues supported me and voiced their

needs; MTSS is not easy with students that are so far behind academically." Participant 1

stated, "Sitting back and assuming that other people know what you are thinking or

struggling with does not work." Participants' school sites not only provided opportunities

by having weekly meetings to discuss MTSS, but also allowed teachers to voice their

concerns. The interviewees did not seem to worry about the consequences of speaking

their minds because they realized teachers and administrators struggle with

communicating and understanding each other's needs within the MTSS model.

     I found teachers and administrators who became part of their MTSS teams guided

their schools to deliver strategies that fit their students. It takes commitment to go from

classroom teacher to a leadership role, each step relying on the next to enhance the person

(Rickards & Stitt-Bergh, 2016). These steps present a whole new set of potential

opportunities for them; the change theory process begins at the discovery stage, realizing

change is necessary. The interviewees did not experience much resistance from their

colleagues; rather, it was the opposite, and they embraced changes to MTSS at the site levels. The interviewees had access to opportunities to change, and they also had an awareness of their strengths with strategies for students. Through collaborations, they realized communication and tying in administrator support was important for change to continue. These conditions within a school can help personal barriers break through and give voices to teachers who did not have one prior.

Adams (2017) stated more trainings and mentorship is needed for teachers and administrators who work with at-risk students; all interviewees confirmed this statement. Participant 5 talked about the department head at their school and how they are a role model for them by being "open and helpful and eager to guide me." Participant 5 went on to say they are "patient and realistic and does not sugar-coat anything," but also said they have not used them as much, as "they are tasked with talking to all the teachers in our department and helping them." The department head has a leadership style that Participant 5 is interested in pursuing by becoming their mentee, but not to everyone in the department. Their mentor seemed to have a greater influence on Participant 5's development as a member of MTSS, and they stated, "I appreciate being able to speak up when they need help." Participant 5 saw themselves as a future mentor and how they have a role in being part of MTSS to help others. As a teacher, they spoke about taking on the responsibility for establishing relationships with other teachers to advance their MTSS skills and strategies. Schools typically defer to their curriculum and instruction departments for teacher development, but Participant 5 has personally assumed responsibility for preparing their colleagues. This effort does contribute to an additional

workload, but they would like to move up in their educational career, so this is a sacrifice they are willing to make.

Participant 6 talked about an administrator who inspired them when they were in their first 3 years of teaching; the administrator "gave me the space to develop into a better teacher and supported and guided me." When Participant 6 spoke of the principal, they indicated they met weekly, but they also mentioned, "Our principal had not only me to check upon, but about 25 other teachers." Participant 1 mentioned, "When you first start out as a teacher, you need someone to vent to and talk things through." They talked about their mentor in that he had "patience to understand that working with high-risk students led to feeling like I couldn't reach them." When discussing the principal at their school, Participant 1 also mentioned, "The principal at any school site is extremely busy, and it's not a person I can turn to very often to discuss strategies or issues that arise using MTSS." Participant 2 indicated, "As a principal, I often work around the clock from answering teachers, students, parents, and community members." Participant 2 talked about being a role model for others, saying, "I would like to be an example for my staff, one that listens and helps change occur." Participant 2 also stated they have had "had mentors that encouraged them and help them be in the position they are in today."

Interestingly, all interviewees talked about being a role model and helping other educators develop in their teaching careers. Still, they each acknowledged the personal sacrifice and commitment required once becoming involved in teams, such as MTSS. Although role models played an aspirational role for many of them in terms of demonstrated success and leadership styles, mentors seemed to play a bigger role in boosting their self-confidence, emotional support, and relationship building. They helped

the most in being comfortable with speaking out on the MTSS team. It appears these role models may also have been effective only up to a certain development point in participants' educational careers. The perceived or real sacrifices and workload may not be worth the tradeoff in the end, which has influenced at least four of the interviewees' decisions to not advance further or even leave their teaching positions soon.

One obstacle facing all interviewees involves implementing MTSS in continuation high schools; namely, communicating the needs of the teachers working with students to the administrators. Four interviewees mentioned implementing the tiered system is difficult without any support from administrators. Having feedback and input from administrators can strengthen the strategies used in the classroom. Providing feedback and positive interactions helps boost self-confidence and reassurances to create change. Participant 5 mentioned, "I realized communication was important and everyone has a voice." Participant 6 stated, "Obstacles exist in the implementation piece; we need to find out what everyone needs to be able to serve kids." Participant 4 mentioned being encouraged by their colleagues, noting, "Speaking up has made the difference in working better with administrators." These examples denote how important it is for administrators to understand that MTSS does not just comprise strategies; rather, the tiered system is incorporated. Without communication, MTSS will not be successful. As indicated by change theory, the experiences of participants and how leadership has influenced their positions within the social relations of their school site as teachers or administrators means their ability to communicate needs is highly dependent on the type of relationships and collaborations they have among school personnel.

Difference Category

In the Difference category, two themes emerged from the interviews. One related to the motivation behind developing a leadership role in MTSS, and the other was related to the changes needed for successful MTSS implementation.

Based on the literature, it is not clear how well district and school administrators communicate about teachers' challenges with implementing MTSS; although MTSS encompasses many strategies that may seem daunting, teachers can use some or all of MTSS strategies in a classroom (Jez & Wassmer, 2015). There is a motivational mismatch between someone assumes or understands about MTSS and actual program implementation. Barber and Fullan (2005) described MTSS as a program that emphasizes collaboration and the need to rework strategies that fit individual students continuously. All interviewees were clearly motivated by team goals and purpose while advancing their skillset as leaders by being part of the MTSS team. Participant 1 discussed influencing the development of teams from the district office side. Participant 3 indicated an interest in contributing more ideas about MTSS and working with a team to create better strategies. Participant 2 mentioned the impact teachers have when students are successful in helping them reach their goals. Participant 6 found, through mentoring teachers, they learned to become a better leader. Being goal-oriented and with purpose, such as enhancing the MTSS program, can lead teachers and school administrators to communicate their challenges.

Two interviewees talked about developing on-campus leadership positions. Participant 6 stated, "Teachers have so much to do, and being involved in leadership takes time," and Participant 5 said, "Being a part of a leadership team like MTSS can be

scary for new teachers." Rickards and Stitt-Bergh (2016) argued challenges emerge when there is a lack of leadership support, confusion about roles and purpose, inadequate resources, and confusion regarding how to analyze and use information. School personnel who implement MTSS have the least confusion when teachers and administrators are on the same page to help students succeed.

Interviewees all said they have conversations with their principals or district office personnel on creating a cohesive MTSS team. Participant 2 indicated having formal conversations once a year with their superintendent. Participant 1 meets with their superintendent often but wishes they had more opportunities to more "formally talk about how things are going with the MTSS." Participant 4 indicated having weekly discussions with their colleagues, and Participant 3 mentioned having regular conversations every other week about MTSS. Participant 5 talked about their principal "encouraging me to step up in my leadership role." They said they were encouraged to take summer workshops to help lead MTSS at their school site. Participant 6 described their career in education as "walking through the steps," and noted how each time they said yes to another opportunity, it led to another. The other interviewees also described their educational careers as steps to their next leadership position.

Each interviewee indicated having regular conversations with their MTSS teams, but only Participant 5 specifically mentioned discussing the direction and development with their principal. They stated their principal wanted them to develop in the role, and one of their goals is to help others find the best way to work with underserved students. Participant 6 discussed their desire to develop other teachers so they can become leaders and "help to develop MTSS skills." Participant 3 mentioned the desire to develop more

leaders to bring MTSS to elementary schools. Participant 1 talked about developing educators and supporting them, although they also mentioned, "Developing educators to become leaders at a school site is harder than you think." In addition to their educational motivations, interviewees also described a desire to go beyond the norm of MTSS. They explored the greater impact it has on students who need to finish 4 years of high school in 2 years. The goal of the interviewees was to have administrators understand MTSS can be difficult to roll out to students who stay in the school for only a very short time. The teachers embraced a different kind of success in their MTSS leadership development: student success. Participant 4 reinforced this notion by saying, "My colleagues around me trust and appreciate what I'm doing and so that you feel confident in helping them navigate MTSS." If every school developed educational leaders from within and encouraged and supported them with clearly defined roles of MTSS, it would bring powerful, systemic change.

Three interviewees indicated they found it difficult and challenging with the additional responsibilities once they became part of the MTSS team. Participant 6 mentioned frustrating administrative tasks, workload, and how "you move three steps forward with an idea, and then the administrator decides against it, and you end up moving back four steps." Participant 5 also cited an increased workload, noting:

> More responsibilities . . . it's a tough and challenging position to be in because you are now giving advice to colleagues and then because of the lack of collaboration with the administrators, you have to go back and tell them something different . . . it becomes confusing for everyone.

Participant 1 also said it is "hard to recruit teachers to be on a team when they are trying to survive with just their classes . . . leadership is demanding, and people come and go." Participant 4 said it is "time-consuming to create specific lessons to students and we use

collaboration time as a way for everyone to share ideas, but we need more input from above." Interestingly, they did not seem to be as frustrated with trying to collaborate with their administrators and colleagues.

Respondents indicated being part of a team without direction is difficult. When discussing their roles on the MTSS team, they mentioned a budget to help buy materials and attend workshops. Participant 2 wanted to attend a workshop with their team members, but no one knew who to ask to access funds because there was no clear direction on who handled such requests. As mentioned previously, Participant 3 indicated they had added to their workload by being on the team, but also consistently mentioned throughout the interviews, "I'm listened to and sometimes, with no direction given, I suggest ways to solve problems and they are taken into consideration by the administrators."

Participant 5 discussed their team involvement and exploring different ways to present strategies to the teachers. When they referred to the level of cross-collaboration and engagement at their school site, they mentioned, "My principal tries hard to cross collaborate and engage the teachers, but it is hard when they don't want to hear us and stick with their personal agenda." Their school site has been quite unsuccessful in breaking down site barriers to promote dialogue between administrators and teachers. Participant 5 has several different administrators and noted collaborating with them has been difficult because they are not on the same page.

Tyre and Feuerborn (2017) stated that school personnel need to reform how they communicate and promote active communication between teachers and administrators. They also discussed how conflict exists between groups that can be disruptive and create

difficulties with prioritizing expectations, stall new ideas, curb decision making, and ultimately affect trust within the MTSS team and school site. The interviewees, such as Participant 5, Participant 4, and Participant 1, cited handling too much responsibility, making difficult decisions that affected students and staff, and having many frustrations stemming from the inability to collaborate effectively. Participant 1 discussed how their schools are trying to collaborate from the site level for MTSS to become fluid and work with other schools as a model.

Printy and Williams (2015) indicated positive outcomes from disciplined cross-collaboration, including increased shared decisions, efficient strategies, and improved quality of decision making from administrators and teachers. Cross-collaboration can also address administrators who have a strong need for power and foster a more collaborative school environment by promoting behaviors that unify and help others be successful. The literature emphasizes collaboration as way for sites to be innovative and successful for the well-being of the school and the students they serve. This assertion also aligns with Rickards and Stitt-Bergh (2016), who shared that engaging staff to support the schools' overall strategic goals for MTSS is a form of collaboration. The discipline part is important; administrators need to carefully manage their time between their school responsibilities and their MTSS team responsibilities. Schools personnel who promote collaboration and are open to change outside of their immediate school site will have better results and provide more equitable strategies for their students at continuation high schools. Incorporating cross-collaboration into the MTSS system begins a new agenda that can bring real change in the continuation high school setting.

Self-reflection was indicated as an important factor for learning more about oneself and how to excel in a leadership role. In the role of teacher or administrator, self-reflection in a leadership position helps make people more aware of their own bias by enabling them to look at themselves in certain situations. Participant 5 mentioned, "I learned that patience and self-reflection goes hand in hand . . . reflecting on if I am doing enough to help my student or am I rushing through material." Participant 1 also talked about "getting to know yourself" through reflection and said, "Words can make a difference to colleagues and students." Participant 2 also commented on learning through self-reflection, stating, "It is important to not dwell on things that are beyond your control, and I have learned to let go." They specifically mentioned having a mentor who was a great listening partner in their early teaching career and helped them become more reflective. Participant 1 also mentioned the use of an administrative coach, and how valuable it is in their position as an assistant superintendent. Participant 4 talked about having professional coaches and mentors for school districts and how effective it is for leaders to grow into better leaders.

I used change theory to focus on experiences and strategies in this study, and not all teachers and administrators may share these same experiences or strategy. Taking the opportunity to reflect on their roles allows them to grow as they develop into their leadership roles on the MTSS team. Self-reflection can reveal individual differences, including contradictions, and help others better embrace and sustain change as they develop their educational leadership careers. This self-reflection reinforces change theory, and when used with continuation high schools, can help teachers and

administrators begin to evolve their MTSS teams into a more cohesive team through change.

Oppression Category

In the Oppression category, two themes emerged from the interviews. One theme was integrating discussions, and the other was leadership development through MTSS development activities. Two recommendations were drawn from each theme and described in the following section. Multiple interviewees described communicating needs for MTSS, from teacher teams to administrators and their teams. The consensus was that more discussions are needed to integrate the two groups together differently. Existing literature has also positioned secondary educators in an important role, as they are responsible for educating students and preparing them for their next steps after high school. Hall and Hord (2011) stated schools should engage in a school learning climate to better transform and adapt to the changing teaching and learning strategies within MTSS. Participant 5 and Participant 6 both commented that equitable voices are on the agendas at their school sites and emphasized the need for more workshops to integrate additional administrative perspectives.

Equitable conversations among teachers and administrators need to occur, and interviewees agreed this gap exists and needs to close. Participant 3 stated, "Being able to have conversations with administrators freely without fear of discipline is what will help." They said teachers discuss how such discourse would be positive, and conversations about helping students would be more equitable. In the literature review of this study, some articles discussed teachers' lack of proper MTSS training as a common theme. Relatedly, Participant 4 indicated, "When it comes to paying for trainings, there is

a resistance from administrators." They specifically mentioned equity should be a topic for administrators who work at either comprehensive high schools or continuation high schools. They also mentioned continuation high schools are often treated differently than comprehensive high schools when it comes to resources needed for the highest risk students. There is a need to educate administrators and leaders on certain nuances, such as techniques that work best with high-risk students and how conversations can change the actions of those in power to foster equity on MTSS teams. Participant 2 discussed integrating the MTSS teams' perspective into the discussion and taking workshops together to enhance the schools' programs. They also mentioned considering the two perspectives that come from administrators versus teachers on MTSS, such as policies, budgets, and resources.

Implementing strategic efforts to address equity among teachers and administrators can have unintended consequences, and school personnel need to be aware of it. Best intentions to bring the two groups together are important, but if too few teachers are represented, the effort could do more harm than good. Participant 4 mentioned it is essential for administrators to be open to having discussions and building trust with teachers to solve questions and avoid "getting a runaround." Participant 1 echoed these statements and said, as an assistant superintendent, they discuss equity among the high school level and address issues that reinforce the importance of having open discussions with teachers. All interviewees indicated equity among the two groups as something their school sites are conscious of and attempt to take care of, but it was clear from all interviewees there is still more work to do. In the educational setting, there

is a need to know about the integrated perspectives of teachers and administrators, along with action toward two-way communication and leadership development.

The interviewees agreed communication needs to be clearer and two-way via multiple methods. Through the interviews, the consensus emerged that administrators and teachers need to make sure they are on the same page regarding MTSS through several methods of communication. They also need to communicate with their colleagues to make sure information is not filtered and there are no misunderstandings. Participant 2 and Participant 3 emphasized the need for strategic information to help students succeed and noted this information should be delivered many times to the teachers and in different ways. I found administrators assume teachers have heard this information in ways they can work with students on the tiered system when the opposite actually occurs, leaving teachers confused. Participant 5 discussed using "information flow charts" to increase communication as much as possible across school sites to avoid skewed perspectives and learning at all levels of the site. Doing so provides a different, systematic approach for sharing knowledge of MTSS strategies and promotes collaboration, which can help break down barriers that exist between teachers and administrators.

All interviewees had prior experience with educational development activities that combined some level of MTSS information when they became teachers and cited training offered internally within their school districts. Participant 5 commented that their MTSS involvement on the school team has been inspiring. They also attended training on a district level for teachers, which provided a network to discuss how other educators handle similar MTSS issues. Participant 5 led a small group focused on understanding

collaboration and communication; they said the experience "taught me patience, and I realized that our frustrations are the same at other sites."

Participant 6 echoed Participant 5's comments on the value of having a different network of colleagues who work with continuation high school students. They mentioned a project in the regional MTSS program they served as a team member on and said their experience was "an eye-opener." They realized there are challenges at many other schools, but their focus is set on their school site to change the way teachers and administrators collaborate. Participant 6 learned that creating a cohesive group of people can create an environment that perpetuates self-confidence and open communication, which can solve future problems before they arise.

Participant 1 commented their school plays a role in leading workshops for teachers, and they also have a role on the districtwide MTSS team. They indicated their role is meaningful and interesting because they can collaborate with other teachers who are part of MTSS at their school sites from K–12. Participant 2 mentioned being selected from their school to attend training for developing leaders involved in MTSS and participating on their school site team. Participant 2 stated these opportunities have been very good for them because they helped them build a network of educators with whom they can talk over a school year. They indicated this opportunity was useful because it allowed them to take things that were learned to try new strategies with their staff and then reflect on results before the next workshop. Participant 1 also commented on the effects of MTSS training and emphasized that training is more effective to give participants time to develop and reflect. Participant 1 also indicated having a mentor provides opportunities for self-reflection.

Transformational leadership within MTSS focuses on administrators being flexible and collaborative with a whole group. Thomas et al. (2020) suggested that transformational leadership can help the two groups grow and change. The interviewees also commented on the need for professional MTSS training, which includes leading a group of teachers, creating and building strategies for student success, measuring students' academic performance, and building a cohesive team. Participant 6 mentioned, "Being part of trainings that help create strategies are more useful to teachers." They mentioned, to be better leaders at the school site, having more professional MTSS training is important. They have a strong background in education and teaching, but they have not trained for leadership roles and are "not prepared without going through another set of class courses outside of work." Participant 1 commented on the "dilemma between teaching and a leadership role," and how district administrators "forget they were once teachers, not politicians," which can create conflict and challenging situations. This conflict can especially occur when building relationships between teachers and administrators.

Offering MTSS training over time and creating workshops to include training on best practices were common academic strategies, as previously mentioned. Leadership methodology, such as transformational leadership styles, can also be beneficial, which Participant 2 and Participant 3 both indicated as helpful in their development.

Power Category

In the Power category, two themes developed in relation to leadership development and various support resources. All interviewees described leadership as a process, which led to the following recommendation: collaboration can lead to new

perspectives and innovative ideas. Leadership development opportunities occur within school sites and can influence site administrators. Fewer interactions among the two can make it difficult for teachers to move into a leadership position. Participant 3 and Participant 6 discussed working beyond their normal teacher hours and found it helped develop interpersonal relationships with their colleagues to solve challenging strategies. Creating an atmosphere of collaboration can allow teachers and administrators to gain a better background and a more comprehensive understanding of the type of strategies needed to make MTSS successful. Participant 2 said bringing knowledge to their school by having worked in different areas of education better prepared them for their administrative role. Participant 4 stated their school struggles with collaboration.

In a continuation high school setting, learning the school culture and how it operates requires learning from different people and understanding various parts of the school's functions. Participant 6 said, "Learning the culture was important," and it was essential to take part in and contribute ideas to help the school function better. Participant 4 and Participant 3 discussed the importance of collaborating, but they specifically mentioned achieving set goals for the MTSS team was important. They implied their collaborations with teaching staff were student focused. Participant 2 also commented, when it comes to change, "It is hard to realize to be better you need to change." Participant 5 stated bias is often a problem in their school because they only listen to administrators, instead of taking into consideration teachers' ideas. Participant 1 commented there are "hidden rules in school cultures." The importance of working collectively with the teachers is consistent with the literature; however, working

collaboratively together and being provided leadership workshops can change the way teachers and administrators interact.

Existing literature has touched on the importance of having mentors, but it is just as important to mentor others (Freeman et al., 2017). Mentorship can help with learning, reflection, and relatability to the overall educational journey. Mentorship also allows existing administrators and those in leadership positions to develop others within their school site. Participant 2 said it is important to remember where one started (i.e., as a teacher) when going into an administrative role. Participant 1 discussed the difficulty of realizing that change is needed for the continuation school's MTSS program to grow. Participant 1 and Participant 2 stated they were given opportunities early in their educational careers to build their leadership skills and learn by doing and reflecting through others, which were all critical aspects in their leadership preparation and development. Participant 5 summed mentorship up when they stated, "It [leadership] takes collaboration to make things happen, you can't do it by yourself."

All six interviewees discussed the different support resources needed from the site and district levels. Without resources or support of training, delivering a comprehensive MTSS program is difficult. Additional tasks, such as creating different curricula for tiered students and the current students, were considered one of the most challenging aspects of serving in education. All interviewees emphasized the need for their administrators to support their needs as teachers. Participant 6 stated, "The administration needs to be more supportive, which will let us be able to speak freely." Participant 5 said they need to "be better listeners and not make a decision before talking to us." Participant 4 mentioned that being surrounded by supportive colleagues allowed discussions to flow freely, but

the need for MTSS is important. Participant 1 discussed the need for flexibility of MTSS teams at the site levels, and to empower them to conceptualize ways for administrators to help them. Participant 2 echoed Participant 1's statement regarding the need for administrators to help them engage in discussion of MTSS. Participant 3 stated, "When there are issues that arise for me, it feels that I have no one to talk to." Expecting teachers or administrators to not talk to someone when parts of MTSS are not working with the students hinders the ability to create an environment that encourages discussion and creates a positive program for the students.

Creating an MTSS team that speaks to one another requires building relationships among colleagues, and this skill is important to practice as leaders evolve. Participant 5 stated, when dealing with building relationships, "It is important that people are open." They said it is important to trust colleagues when discussing issues that arise in MTSS. Participant 1 emphasized the importance of building relationships and having effective conversations. They gave an example of when they first started as a teacher; the work environment was toxic and did not support relationship building. Participant 1 indicated being approachable as an important trait for leadership development and having a trusted network of colleagues to work through problems. Participant 6 talked about the ability to have a trusted network to help provide workshops and training needed for MTSS. They said they learned how important it is for people to feel supported. Participant 4 also discussed building relationships to help teachers achieve better ways to ask for strategies and apply strategies for students to be successful.

Coalition Building

In the Coalition Building category, one theme developed in relation to confidence building opportunities. Each interviewee acknowledged each of their schools lack confidence in building coalitions among their staff. Participant 1 and Participant 2 both noted they work with schools and try to build confidence among their staff at the beginning of each year. Participant 4 discussed shared decision making occurring when teachers need to find a solution to work with students in the tiered system. Participant 5 discussed working together in a more flexible school environment aligned with MTSS at comprehensive schools. Participant 6 talked about building teams at the beginning of the year and building confidence with new teachers. This tactic helped them get to know the teachers, and they were able to create a team willing to be open in their frustrations with MTSS. Participant 3 stated, given the opportunity to team build across schools for those involved in MTSS, they would do it at the start of every school year. Participant 6 noted they try to continue to mentor and give their colleagues the same support that they had, as "trying to guide new teachers and present them with MTSS can be daunting for them." Participant 5 commented about creating a level playing field for teachers and administrators who can participate in problem solving to develop better MTSS programs. Participant 1 stated it is important for "teachers to feel comfortable to speak openly."

The type of collaboration interviewees described reflected one inclusive goal across the school sites that encourages team building. Three interviewees discussed continued challenges with school culture and how it can be positive or negative. Participant 6 stated school culture plays a role in how teachers' and administrators' relationships are positive or negative, noting, "It's important to be able to let people grow

into their positions but also to encourage them to seek leadership positions." Participant 1 commented successful school districts are those inward-looking, which tend to look for the negative and spend time putting out fires. Participant 3 noted their school site has "been doing things the same way, and the idea of teaching students differently is a foreign concept." They talked about a time when they were a teacher and had a new MTSS strategy and noted, "Creating curriculum backwards to forwards was creating a goal for students to achieve, this suggestion was not taken well."

These stories suggest significant shifts needed to move school sites forward and begin anew to collaborate. This design begins to make teachers realize there is a communication gap; as Fullan (2015) indicated, creating an environment that realizes change is needed affects all areas of the school site, such as MTSS. This environment forces collaboration among teachers and administrators in a way that positively changes the way MTSS meetings are held and can subsequently improve equity. As Participant 5 mentioned earlier, collaboration becomes helpful when the MTSS team needs to achieve students' goals. Participant 1 mentioned the importance of focusing more on serving as a mentor to other administrators and teachers. Participant 4 commented on MTSS discussions at their school site, which have included recruiting teachers to the team and focusing on training them properly; they noted: "Different personal relationships can be built if the foundation is created for them to be successful."

Advice

I asked interviewees what they thought was an important part of leadership development for teachers and administrators and what advice they would give their colleagues. Four interviewees recommended teachers and administrators be open to

change in their schools, which is important for the leadership development of the MTSS team. Researchers have similarly argued that without change, stagnation can occur, with no interest in progressing an organization forward (McCart & Miller, 2020). Change can help school personnel collaborate by making the best decisions for students and their MTSS programs. Participant 4 stated administrators need to understand "what makes a school successful is the teachers working together and communicating with each other." Speaking up and stating their needs can help form better way to help students. Participant 5 and Participant 6 echoed this sentiment and said their goal for schools is to find a way to change.

All six interviewees stated mentors were the reason they continued in education. Some described having different mentors at different stages of their educational journeys. Participant 2 recommended it helped having a mentor as a teacher and then a different mentor when beginning their role as a school principal. Having mentors can help educators become better teachers and reflect on how they can improve. Mentors can impact education careers and encourage teachers to take a leadership role at the school site or even move up to administration.

In this study, I made connections between recommendations found in the six interviewees' experiences, change theory, and implementation science. Table 11 presents a summary of these recommendations and their theoretical connections.

Table 11

Connection of Practical Application to Change Theory and Implementation Science

Category	Practical application	Connection to change theory	Connection to implementation science
Identity	Practical Application 1: Be more aware of the continuation high school needs that are significantly different than comprehensive high schools. The communication and collaboration that teachers and administrators need to be aware of in order to enhance their MTSS programs. Practical Application 2: Increase the number of MTSS workshops and site level trainings to increase the number of strategies used to help students. Involve teachers and administrators in the same space and begin joint conversations.	Individuals have the opportunity to create change and grow their school sites Teachers and administrators develop a plan for MTSS that is vetted by both groups	The intervention or practice being implemented can focus on collaboration and communication The intervention or practice being implemented can focus on workshops and trainings
Difference	Practical Application 3: Take on a renewed focus on a leadership by being more involved in MTSS collaboration, development and mentorship of new teachers and administrators to the continuation high school. Practical Application 4: Promote teacher and administrator collaboration and cultivate more leaders for better results providing a more innovative yet equitable way for each side to communicate their MTSS needs. Practical Application 5: Offer mentors to help teachers and	Teachers, who work closest with the students, should have a stronger leadership role in designing and leading MTSS Changing the way leaders are created can lead to "homegrown" leadership Recognizing that change is needed and building a cohesive MTSS through mentors	Schools can identify and create mentorship programs that address gaps Promote the way teachers and administrators work together through adaptation Creating mentorship programs within the school site and districtwide.

Category	Practical application	Connection to change theory	Connection to implementation science
	administrators reflect on their MTSS leadership roles and learn more about themselves.		
Oppression	Practical Application 6: Integrate MTSS discussions and leadership development with the continuation high schools at site level and district level meetings. Practical Application 7: Offer MTSS development activities, workshops and trainings prior to the school year starting and throughout the year. Include region and state-wide opportunities as well as professional trainings about MTSS, best strategies, administrative best practices, and bias to support continuation high schools.	Better outcomes when change is brought to all levels of the school district Becoming aware of change and creating a way for teachers and administrators to have yearly trainings	Interventions to implement more discussions Changing the way interventions are presented
Power	Practical Application 8: Recognize that leadership development is a social process and eliminate the administrative or teacher only thinking and create an atmosphere of collaboration. Practical application 9: Offer various support resources to the MTSS teams at site and district level.	Organize forward thinking educators with shared goals Advocating for various support resources	Implement leadership collaboration and open thinking Implement more resources to MTSS teams
Coalition Building	Practical Application 10: Be an outward-looking school site and offer more confidence- building opportunities for teachers and administrators for MTSS.	Trainings and supporting teacher and administrators	Implementing more confidence-building opportunities

Category	Practical application	Connection to change theory	Connection to implementation science
Advice	Practical Application 11: Be open to change at the teacher and administrator level.	Be open to teacher and administrator led recommendations for MTSS	Integrate knowledge of implementation during workshops and trainings
	Practical Application 12: Ask for mentors for the MTSS teams and change them often.	Being able to be open and ask for different mentors at different stages of the educational career	Mentors that help implement change and growth

Recommendations for Action

Findings from this study present two implications for MTSS; first, school personnel need to provide more opportunities for collaboration between teachers and administrators. Second, there is a strong need to provide MTSS workshops and training. It is important to consider implications from both perspectives to enable increased opportunity for change.

School district personnel must do more to create change to support learning and engage their leaders to help sustain a more equitable MTSS team. Administrators should have more responsibility for engaging teachers collaboratively with others to understand that each role can make a difference. Being able to close the gap of communication and collaboration by having administrators understand teachers requires guidance and strategy. Communication plays a role in keeping things moving; confusion will occur if communication is not delivered effectively or collaboratively. Many teachers find communication can be incorrect in education, and often, intention is lost in the translation. As Rickards and Stitt-Bergh (2016) stated, teachers and administrators need to mentor new teachers and invite new ideas to progress MTSS at their school sites.

Schools present unique challenges, and continuation high schools have students who need academic help and require teamwork to help students graduate. This unique situation encourages teachers and administrators to continue to work together and collaborate. School structure plays a role in encouraging teachers to become leaders. Having school leaders encourage teachers will build future leaders and a successful MTSS team. School personnel can develop more substantial ways to solve student-related academic issues by enabling teachers to access more opportunities. These opportunities, such as more training, can help schools grow.

When schools undergo new changes, it can send signals and help underscore reasons for related change. School personnel can look to revamp their MTSS agenda in a way that provides teachers and administrators the opportunity to grow and change. Such strategies include more training provided by the school site, district, or regional conferences. Having specific targeted training for MTSS and continuation high schools can provide various kinds of support needed to help educators restructure their MTSS programs. Support should also come in the form of adequate administrative support to help teachers keep up with new ideas, innovations, and educational, legal compliance while providing the best ways for students to benefit from academic strategies.

Training is another form of support found to be essential in MTSS development. Training should be aligned with the transition to help teachers and administrators learn to be better leaders. Training should include a regional component to help develop connections and build networks with other continuation high schools. The goal through this training is to provide an opportunity for self-reflection to build confidence and help change perspectives by continuously developing strategies that work best for their school

environments. Combining support and training initiatives will help teachers and administrators work together and see where gaps can close between the two groups.

Collaboration and effective communication require consistency. Email, zoom meetings, and group conversations all can lead to making sure everyone is on the same page. As each interviewee stated, collaborative conversations or one-time email messages or in-person discussions can still lead to misinterpretation. For schools to communicate effectively, those in leadership positions must use different tactics to engage their MTSS teams. Engaging teachers builds confidence and, in turn, can help create a more positive environment.

Schools can improve their MTSS practices by focusing on collaboration, mentorship, and professional development opportunities within their organization to bring about lasting change. As found in the existing research, schools with collaborative teams can have a sense of direction, maintain effective communication, and increase access to training (Caprara et al., 2000). School personnel should embrace a renewed focus on the MTSS system that formalizes choosing leaders for the team. Leaders should collaborate, bring new ideas, and be team players. Based on the research, mentorship plays a significant role and will help guide the MTSS team.

Application to Leadership

Providing opportunities for teachers in a leadership capacity can help them gain experience and knowledge in MTSS and develop as long-term leaders. Giving time for leaders to develop a continuation high school culture takes time, and rushing into leadership can cause burnout; however, if teachers can combine duties with their current teaching positions, they can reflect, and this reflection can help their development as

better leaders. Self-reflection is a way for leaders to develop and guide new teachers and administrators and giving them small tasks allows them to build confidence (Algozzine et al., 2017). Other criteria for building a successful MTSS program are having a mentor for teachers and administrators because mentorship helps increase self-confidence and offers an opportunity to learn more about oneself.

Interviewees described different kinds of support they had throughout their educational journey, including having supportive colleagues, leadership coaches and mentors, and teacher support. The interviewees mentioned networking provided them opportunities for collaboration and different perspectives as they worked with underserved students with below-grade-level attainment. I concluded teachers and administrators need to communicate more successfully to address the needs of a growing population of continuation high school students via the tiered MTSS process. School district personnel should examine the types of MTSS support provided to continuation high school students instead of comprehensive high school students. There should also be consideration of offering alternative ways to support teachers that will help them develop MTSS competencies. Offering them experiences will provide new understandings and broaden perspectives that break with the status quo.

Openness to change may yield positive outcomes for a school site. The ability to notice change, plan for change, and continue to act on change can create an action-ready MTSS team. Additionally, serving as part of such change can ensure that when mistakes occur, stakeholders can solve the issues by taking chances with new strategies and engaging in advocacy. All interviewees suggested teachers and administrators should not limit themselves and instead try new educational opportunities that come their way;

moreover, they should also have an opportunity to redesign the MTSS programs at their school sites.

Administrators' leadership styles and administrative support emerged as common themes within the Power category. Interviewees acknowledged administrative leadership as a process that requires helping teachers continue to grow and refine the best implementation of MTSS. Not being able to shift one's administrative leadership styles and adapt to the teachers' styles can prevent progress amid a systematic approach to refining strategies with MTSS. This approach enables individuals to be the vehicle of power within the school site and elevate the school district.

Findings showed all interviewees are members of their MTSS teams and began as teachers. In addition to MTSS participation at their school sites, five of the interviewees' schools incorporate teachers to help represent their school at districtwide meetings and include administrators in their decision-making teams. School personnel should look at changing policies to offer more inclusion at the site level and foster engagement with continuation high schools outside the district. MTSS teams should include student voice because they are the ones MTSS targets in its tiered system. As Shenton (2004) stated, strategies to encourage voice and involvement from other people require openness to change. School personnel should look at the mix of their MTSS leadership team and, as data have shown, diversity in a school can improve performance (Balu et al., 2015). Equity in voice provides an opportunity for people to be open and voice concerns they have with making MTSS more structured. Schools interested in creating an open-voiced MTSS leadership team should consider a balanced and collaborative structure to allow voices to emerge from teachers or administrators who may otherwise be silent.

The interviewees stated mentors played an important role in their educational journeys. All participants suggested the MTSS team should ask for mentors and be encouraged to change them frequently to look at strategies differently as a whole. Existing MTSS leaders can serve as mentors and role models for new teachers unfamiliar to the tiered design. This mentorship will allow voices to be heard and more problem solving at all levels.

Recommendations for Further Research

There are clear connections between the recommendations found in participants' experiences, change theory, and implementation science, which better understand change within secondary education, learning, and mentorship. There was foreshadowing for five interviewees on whether they would be able to create a cohesive, collaborative team in addition to their responsibilities as teachers. Participant 6 commented their school site sometimes focuses on the wrong direction, that "we look for the negative and blame instead of looking for solutions." It would be beneficial to conduct further research among teachers and administrators who left their positions to compare their experiences with district administrators; namely, if or what they know about teachers implementing MTSS in continuation high schools. Knowing history could further inform other MTSS teams of common trends occurring among them.

The first recommendation for future research would be to conduct a narrative study of comprehensive high schools' personnel involved in MTSS to understand and identify if they operate with similar gaps of administrators not knowing what teachers know about the implementation of MTSS. A study of these potential participants may

provide useful insight by understanding the size of the high schools and the difficulty that may occur due to the volume of tiered students.

The second recommendation for future research is for continuation high schools to prioritize training and workshops for teachers and administrators to change how they use MTSS at their school sites. The literature and findings supported that communication among both groups is imperative to students graduating from high school. Also, the findings showed that teachers and administrators benefit from mentors. They are uniquely positioned to influence the inclusion of change to mentor and develop their staff in providing MTSS framework for student success.

Although it would be valuable to future researchers to examine why students of color and special education students makeup the majority of continuation high school populations, comprehensive high school personnel must also look to creating a better MTSS framework to help these students when they enter in the 9th grade. The need to develop a cohesive MTSS program districtwide leads to the last recommendation, to professionally develop MTSS leaders at the comprehensive high schools and continuation high schools. Whether through professional training, academic coursework, or workshops designed in-house, the teachers and administrators will understand how to support both sets of students that transfer between the comprehensive high school and the continuation high school.

Concluding Statement

I used change theory and implementation science as the primary lenses to examine and understand what district administrators know about teachers implementing MTSS in continuation schools in northern California. When access to workshops,

training, and supportive resources are embedded into the regular school year and become part of a school's climate, it can change the outcome and success of MTSS. A school site can make greater strides toward equity of voice, mentorship, and regular communication and can create a more favorable environment so teachers and administrators have the courage to collaborate effectively and learn from each other.

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APPENDIX A

Participation Study Invitation

Dear _____:

> **COVID-19** refers to the Coronavirus that is being spread across people in our communities. We need to provide you with important information about COVID-19 (direct individuals to local Department of Health information on Covid-19), and to review your study participation because of COVID-19 related risks. To minimize risk, contact with the researcher will only be conducted by telephone and/or video interviews. You will not be asked to meet with the researcher in person.

I would like to invite you to participate in the study I am conducting as part of my doctoral degree requirement. The purpose of this narrative study is to examine California continuation high schools and their implementation of MTSS at the local school level. Your responses will guide future research and help other continuation high schools in understanding the barriers and the effective practices with implementation of MTSS in a continuation high school setting.

The interview questions regarding your process for the implementation of MTSS, your policies, systems and structures and the allocation of resources. As a fellow continuation high school administrator, I am aware of the limitations and challenges we face in implementing effective MTSS. Any information that could result in your identification will not be reported and were kept confidential. There are no identifiable risks associated with study. You will have the option of providing your contact information and subsequently may be selected for a brief follow-up telephone interview so that I can better understand the interview data.

Thank you in advance for your help,

Maria Ramos

APPENDIX B

MTSS Continuation High School Interview Protocol

Interviewee _____   Date__/___/_____

Interview Introduction Script for Participants

> **COVID-19** refers to the Coronavirus that is being spread across people in our communities. We need to provide you with important information about COVID-19 (direct individuals to local Department of Health information on Covid-19), and to review your study participation because of COVID-19 related risks. To minimize risk, contact with the researcher will only be conducted by telephone and/or video interviews. You will not be asked to meet with the researcher in person.

Thank you for your participation in the interview regarding MTSS in your district. This is the second of a two-part process for data collection related to study. The research aims to understand how district and school administrators communicate effectively about teachers' challenges in implementing MTSS in continuation schools in northern California. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete and will include questions related to how your district overcame the challenges of implementation. It will include questions about leadership, resources, budget, support systems, metrics, and analysis. The purpose is to help understand the factors that impact schools and districts who overcame the barriers of integrating MTSS. I would like your permission to record the interview, so I may accurately document the information you provide. If at any time during the interview you want to stop, please let me know. Your answers are confidential, your name, district, and school will not be used in any way in the research paper. The data was coded and reported in the aggregate and will not be directly attributed to one person. All coding information and interview responses was deleted upon completion of

this research study every attempt was made to ensure that there is no foreseeable risk for participation in the interview.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop, take a break, for feel uncomfortable, return to a question, please let me know. There is no compensation for participating and your participation is completely voluntary.

APPENDIX C

Guiding Interview Questions

The guiding interview questions are as follows:

1) How clear is your school or district's vision for MTSS?

2) To what extent are staff members "bought-in" to the leadership team's vision for MTSS implementation?

3) Who is primarily responsible for carrying out interventions? (e.g., interventionists, counselors, teachers)

4) How clearly are expectations for MTSS implementation documented for staff members?

5) To what extent is the school-based leadership team engaged in Tier 1-level problem solving to increase the effectiveness of universal learning supports?

6) How do teams determine when student(s) will require supplemental and more intensive, individualized learning support?

7) Who provides the learning support? Are the highest levels of expertise and skill matched to the students with the most significant needs?

8) How is assistance to educators provided to ensure fidelity of implementation?

9) What is the setting for the learning supports? Where will the learning supports take place and when?

10) So far, how effectively have staff been trained on MTSS and why it's important?

11) How comfortable do school-level staff feel with the use of data to inform student supports and tiered instruction?

12) How much training have staff received on the different types of interventions for every tier?

13) How equipped are staff in our district to discuss and address the needs of diverse learners?

14) How often does your team use asset-based language when discussing student needs and strengths?

15) How often do staff reach out to students and their families to share positive updates?

16) How often is staff feedback incorporated to drive continuous improvement of our MTSS process?

17) How equipped are staff in our district to discuss and address the needs of diverse learners?

18) How often does your team use asset-based language when discussing student needs and strengths?

19) How equipped are staff in our district to discuss and address the needs of diverse learners?

20) How often does your team use asset-based language when discussing student needs and strengths?

21) How often do staff reach out to students and their families to share positive updates?

22) How often is staff feedback incorporated to drive continuous improvement of our MTSS process?