



Colorado Multi-Tiered System of Supports (COMTSS)

Strategy Guide 2.1

Strategy Vision and Description

In this guide, we define Colorado Multi-Tiered System of Supports as a prevention-based framework using team-driven leadership and data-based problem solving to improve the outcomes of every student through family, school, and community partnerships, comprehensive assessment, and a layered continuum of supports. Implementation science and universal design for learning are employed to create one integrated system that focuses on increasing academic and behavioral outcomes to equitably support the varying needs of all students.

Research has shown that the following components support the implementation of an effective COMTSS framework. It is important to note that while there is evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of each component, these components are most effective when implemented together. The following components are derived from various articles and research and have been adopted by Colorado as the foundation for creating a sustainable system of supports:

1. **Team-Driven Shared Leadership**
2. **Data-based Problem Solving and Decision-Making**
3. **Family, School, and Community Partnerships**
4. **Comprehensive Screening and Assessment System**
5. **Layered Continuum of Supports.**

Evidence Base

ESSA defines levels of research based on the quality of the study (Levels 1-4). CDE requires that schools and districts identify the research base for strategies that they select for their Unified Improvement Plans, and for applications for school improvement funds in the EASI application.

The research on **Colorado Multi-Tiered System of Supports** that is cited here meets the threshold for **ESSA Level 1-3**.

Necessary Preconditions

Required Preconditions. Before implementing this strategy, designate a staff member who will be the COMTSS Coordinator for the Implementation Team (see Core Component 1, below) as well as a decision maker/administrator who will support and champion the work.

Readiness Indicators: The school or district should ensure that leadership is supportive of COMTSS and is willing to dedicate the necessary time, resources, and professional development to ensure fidelity and quality of implementation efforts. School or district should also confirm they have adequate capacity to staff an Implementation Team (see Core Component 1, below). Note that an existing team (e.g., a Building Leadership Team) may act as an Implementation Team, provided team members have sufficient capacity to put in the time and effort needed to support the implementation of COMTSS.

Supportive Preconditions. The following strategies, systems, or structures support the implementation of this strategy, but they are not required:

- Adopting a predictable problem-solving and decision-making process
- Building a strong foundation at Tier 1 with a prevention focus;
- Identifying improvement needs and activities;
- Selecting instructional practices, interventions, and supports across the tiers;
- Securing data management systems, and
- Creating ongoing professional development and coaching opportunities.

Since COMTSS includes many significant components of comprehensive school improvement, as detailed in the Core Components section, having any of these supportive structures or systems in place ahead of time (e.g., coaching systems, assessment practices, data management systems, etc.) will give schools and districts a head start in their COMTSS implementation.

Contextual Fit

Possible Root Causes include inadequate, inconsistent or ineffective...

- Attendance and engagement systems
- Student support services
- Universal math instruction
- Universal Reading instruction
- Discipline procedures
- Approaches to Student Behavior
- Implementation of practices
- Underdeveloped Response to Intervention process

Is this strategy a good fit for your district/school?

- COMTSS creates a framework to support foundational practices. As long as the district or school has a commitment to continuous improvement and the involvement of leadership to align priorities, secure funding and resources, ensure training and coaching occur and make decisions based on data, COMTSS is a good fit for any district or school that is able to devote 3-5 years to implementation activities.

Core Components, Elements & Activities

Research has shown that the following components support the implementation of an effective COMTSS framework. It is important to note that while there is evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of each

component independent of one another, the framework is most effective when all five components are implemented together and may be approached concurrently, as they work in concert and are mutually supporting. More information about each component including defined standards for COMTSS in practice can be found at: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/mtss/comtss-practice-profiles-school-use-pdf>

Core Component 1: Team-Driven Shared Leadership

Teaming processes and structures that focus on distributing responsibility and shared decision-making across and within regions, districts, and schools to effectively design and use systems of training, coaching, resources, implementation, and evaluation.

Elements or Activities	Description
<i>Create an implementation team</i>	An implementation team is created with clearly defined roles and responsibilities and includes representation from all stakeholders (e.g., special education, general education, families, students, mental health, community, etc.). This work involves considering system-wide changes and therefore at least one member on the team should be a senior leader with decision making authority that can allocate resources to support the efforts of the team.
<i>Generate and implement team operating procedures</i>	Create a meeting schedule that includes team meetings that occur at least monthly. These meetings should include a regular meeting format/agenda, norms, and meeting minutes
<i>Design an action plan or align with the current action plan</i>	Create a COMTSS Action Plan, aligned with the identified priority performance challenge, that includes common language, common goals, and resources/funding allocations, and professional development needs.

Core Component 2: Data-based Problem Solving and Decision Making

A continuous improvement process used by teams to collect, analyze, and evaluate information to inform decision making at the system and student levels.

Elements or Activities	Description
<i>Determine the problem-solving process</i>	Determine and put into place a formal problem-solving process (problem identification, problem analysis, plan implementation, and plan evaluation) to conduct continuous improvement cycles.

Elements or Activities	Description
<i>Create a data collection system</i>	Establish a system of universal, targeted, and intensive data collection at the student level, in both academics and behavior, and at the staff level for support needs and implementation efforts.
<i>Implement progress monitoring</i>	Put into action high quality, evidence based universal screening and progress monitoring tools in all academic and behavioral domains. Collect and respond to data on the effectiveness of professional development and fidelity of implementation.

Core Component 3: Family, School, and Community Partnerships

Families, early-childhood programs, schools, and communities actively partner to develop, implement, and evaluate effective and equitable practices to improve educational outcomes for children and youth. The elements below correspond to the four Essential Elements of the [P-12 Family, School, and Community Partnerships Framework](#).

Elements or Activities	Description
<i>Create an inclusive culture</i>	Facilitate opportunities for families and educational staff to mutually collaborate with community partners (e.g., businesses, organizations, institutions of higher education) to connect students, families, and staff to expanded learning opportunities, community services, and civic participation.
<i>Build trusting relationships</i>	Create a supportive family environment that include flexible hours and meeting times, partnering vocabulary (i.e., “we” and “our”)
<i>Design capacity building opportunities</i>	Educate all stakeholders in sharing responsibilities; consistently organize and distribute data that is accessible to every family. The Team provides (a) usable and easy-to-read reports on academic and behavioral data, and (b) guidance to understand data displays.
<i>Dedicate necessary resources</i>	Collaborate with every stakeholder group to ensure clear policies, documents, and procedures have been adopted to support Family, School, and Community Partnering (FSCP).

Core Component 4: Comprehensive Screening and Assessment System

A Comprehensive Screening and Assessment System is the coordinated effort of gathering information across multiple measures to support decision making at the system and student level for the whole child.

Elements or Activities	Description
<i>Utilize a comprehensive assessment system</i>	Utilize a comprehensive assessment system to evaluate the quality, equity, and efficiency of instruction, interventions, environment, and supports to create a responsive system assessing both academics and behavior.
<i>Dedicate necessary resources</i>	Collaborate with every stakeholder group to ensure time and resources are allocated to educators to support ongoing, high-quality professional learning for all assessments.
<i>Create and/or review assessment protocols and schedules</i>	Ensure written guidance for all assessments and provide the schedule, collection, and regular use of high-quality screening; diagnostics; progress monitoring; and formative, summative, and fidelity assessments.

Core Component 5: Layered Continuum of Supports

Ensuring that every student receives equitable whole child supports that are evidence based, culturally responsive, matched to need, and developmentally appropriate through layered supports.

Elements or Activities	Description
<i>Create learning opportunities</i>	Build understanding and skills around tiered logic with every stakeholder. Analyze the knowledge and skills of stakeholders (staff and families) when selecting content and supports for adult learning experiences. Coordinate training, education, and technical assistance on high quality, prevention based, layered supports for staff and students that will improve academic and behavioral outcomes for every student.
<i>Use data-based problem solving</i>	Uses a data-based problem solving and decision-making process when providing supports at the system and personnel level.
<i>Provide guidance for implementation</i>	Provide guidance for school implementation of practices across a layered continuum. A prevention focus is prioritized.

Guidance for Implementation

Implementation Element	Description
<i>Staffing and teams</i>	<p>Prior to implementation, school leadership gains buy-in from staff through the creation of a shared understanding of the COMTSS framework and its alignment to the strategic plan.</p> <p>An implementation team is created with a team lead who will coordinate the work and ensure representation from all stakeholders (e.g., special education, general education, families, students, mental health, community, etc.). At least one member on the team should be a senior leader with decision making authority that can allocate resources to support the efforts of the team.</p> <p><i>District-Level Implementation Team:</i> Having a district or regional level implementation team to support schools in their COMTSS scale-up efforts makes it easier for schools to prioritize efforts as it is a 3-5 year process. The main purpose of the COMTSS District Implementation Team is to build infrastructure that supports the implementation of the five components of COMTSS at both the district and the school level. The building of this infrastructure includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identifying and aligning key priorities; 2. Securing funding, resources, and time to implement those priorities; 3. Developing training and coaching structures to support personnel with implementation; 4. Gathering data to evaluate the implementation and impact of the key priorities, and 5. Using evidence of successful instructional practices to inform policy. <p>For more information about the activities conducted by the district implementation team, please see the District Implementation Guide.</p> <p><i>School-Level Implementation Team:</i> At the school level, an implementation team with the capacity and commitment to lead implementation activities throughout the 3-5-year implementation timeline is critical to the success of COMTSS. The school Implementation Team will look to the district or regional implementation team to ensure alignment of priorities.</p> <p>For more information about the activities conducted by the school implementation team, please see the School Implementation Guide and the School Implementation Companion Guide.</p>

Implementation Element	Description
<i>Considerations for training & resources</i>	<p>The implementation team will decide on a focus area and complete the professional development plan to ensure time and resources are allocated for necessary training and resources.</p> <p>The COMTSS Professional development plan can help to ensure professional development is effective, that it is adequately supported, and that the right people are involved.</p>
<i>Implementation stages, considerations for pacing</i>	<p>Full Implementation of COMTSS can be expected to take between 3-5 years and will likely not result in a linear process through the stages of implementation. For a detailed plan of implementation, including how to pace out implementation activities over this period of time, please reference the COMTSS School Implementation Guide which will provide information about the activities in each stage of implementation as well additional resources and defined evidence of outcomes.</p>
<i>Progress monitoring</i>	<p>Data sources, collection procedures, and analysis processes will be determined by the implementation team. Various types of data can be used in this process in order to provide a clear picture of the selected area of focus. Data collected must include student outcome data and fidelity data.</p> <p>The School Fidelity Tool (SFT) measures the extent to which school personnel are applying features of COMTSS and is organized by the five components. The SFT is intended to act as a companion to the COMTSS School Implementation Guide. Used together, the implementation team to guide next steps in implementation and prioritize high quality professional learning aligns with identified growth areas.</p>
<i>Change management</i>	<p>Successful implementation of COMTSS will require system-level changes in processes and protocols while attending to the needs of adults within the learning community to maintain buy-in and effective implementation. Leaders in implementation must address technical changes using skill-building activities, infrastructure development, and measuring outcomes. Additionally, leaders in implementation must engage staff, families, and students in shared decision-making, planning and implementation, continuously monitor the implementation of prioritized initiatives and make timely adjustments if needed and communicate effectively to stakeholders about goals and progress.</p>

Sample Implementation Plan

Context: The following Sample Implementation Plan assumes that a school does not currently have COMTSS in place and is installing this strategy for the first time. This sample covers Year One of COMTSS implementation. A true action plan should specify precise dates and date-ranges for each activity. Dates reflected below can also be adjusted to align with the district UIP or other school or district context.

Name	Description	Start/End Date	Key Personnel
<i>Create an implementation team</i>	<p>The school implementation team is created and includes key stakeholder representation. This team must include a team lead as well as administration with decision-making authority.</p> <p>The implementation team creates a common vision and uses organizational structures and processes as guidance to establish their effective teaming practices.</p>	<i>Months 1-2</i>	School leadership with the support of the district implementation team
<i>Increasing capacity in knowledge</i>	The implementation team <i>Engages in Learning about COMTSS</i> to gain an understanding of the framework and what it takes to implement effectively.	<i>Months 1-2</i>	District support Implementation team
<i>District and School leadership creates a common vision for COMTSS</i>	School leadership and the implementation team provide a COMTSS overview for staff defining COMTSS, describing the benefits and expected outcomes, and how the work aligns with other district and school priorities.	<i>Months 1-2</i>	School leadership Implementation Team
<i>COMTSS School Fidelity Tool is completed</i>	The implementation team assesses COMTSS implementation by completing the COMTSS-School Fidelity Tool to gain a better understanding of the scope of the work and to obtain a baseline score.	<i>Months 3-4</i>	Implementation Team
<i>COMTSS District and School Implementation Guides are reviewed</i>	The implementation team uses the COMTSS School Implementation Guide to inform implementation planning and timelines.	<i>Months 3-4</i>	District support Implementation Team
<i>Increasing capacity to engage in and utilize data-based</i>	The implementation team is trained in four-step problem solving process and goes through a data	<i>Months 4-5</i>	District Support

Name	Description	Start/End Date	Key Personnel
<i>problem solving, and decision-making.</i>	protocol to prioritize needs and desired outcomes.		Implementation Team
<i>An Implementation Plan is developed or enhanced.</i>	<p>The implementation team creates an implementation plan to achieve desired outcomes by analyzing the information gathered through the SFT, the data protocol, and the implementation guide. <i>The plan includes activities, necessary resources (including training and coaching), responsible parties, timelines, and data collection related implementation and outcome data.</i></p> <p>Activities identified in the implementation plan include those targeting the five components of COMTSS to ensure the infrastructure is in place for effective implementation. This plan is reviewed quarterly and adjusted based upon information gathered from fidelity of implementation and outcome data.</p>	<i>Months 6-7</i>	District Support Implementation Team
<i>Professional Development Plan is created that aligns with implementation plan.</i>	The implementation team ensures time and resources are allocated to support ongoing, high-quality professional learning for staff and families. Professional learning includes a coaching component and tiered supports for adults, an understanding of any of the COMTSS components put in place at the school level, and strategies, interventions, or instructional practices to target the prioritized area of need.	<i>Months 8-10</i>	District Support Implementation Team
<i>An initial Communication Plan is developed or enhanced.</i>	The implementation team develops a communication plan to engage staff, administrators, students, and families in the development of COMTSS priorities including academic achievement and social, emotional, and behavioral development.	<i>Months 11-12</i>	District Support Implementation Team

Additional Resources

Additional Resources

- [Colorado Multi-tiered System of Supports Webpage](#): Main page for the Office of Learning Supports
 - [COMTSS Online Academy](#): A series of online learning modules providing information about COMTSS (Note: you will need to create a free account to access this resource.)
 - [Regional, District and School Practice Profiles](#): The COMTSS Practice Profiles were developed to specify exemplary strategies that regional, district and school implementation teams can use to support effective and sustainable use of the COMTSS framework as intended.
 - [COMTSS Tools and Resources](#): Resources to support the implementation of the COMTSS framework.
- [The National Implementation Research Network](#): Learning modules and resources pertaining to implementation science
- [State Implementation and Scaling-Up of Evidence-Based Practices](#): National technical assistance center providing resources and tools pertaining to implementation science

Sources

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Additional Sources Supporting Implementation of the Strategy

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