

ANALYZING THE EXPERIENCES OF STAFF, STUDENTS and PARENTS ON THE
EFFECTS OF PROVIDING MTSS FRAMEWORK INTERVENTIONS and SUPPORTS FOR
STUDENTS ENROLLED IN AN ALTERNATIVE LEARNING PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

Providing supports and interventions to students that are behind academically is critical to their success. These struggling students must be supported by addressing their academic gaps, while also addressing factors that contribute to them being considered at-risk. The MTSS Framework is a research-based approach that has been shown to be effective in the process of supporting students that are at-risk of not being successful in school. This study seeks to analyze the results of implementing the MTSS Framework within an Alternative Learning Program. The purpose of this research is to collect data on the thoughts and opinions of staff, students and parents on the effects of the MTSS Framework supports on students enrolled in our Alternative Learning Program. Data analyzed from this study will be used to gauge how best to support future students that enroll in our Alternative Learning Program.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my wife Linda. You encouraged and supported me on this journey and I am eternally grateful for your love and support. I also dedicate this dissertation to my children Aureion, Janarde jr., Jazmia, Jaden and Micah. Thanks for your love and support. I pray that my journey to complete this study shows you that you can do all things through Christ. This dissertation is also dedicated to my parents Bob and Debra Cannon. This dissertation would not be possible if it was not for the lifelong love and support that you provided, and the hard work ethic that you instilled in me. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my paternal and maternal grandmothers, Fannie Mae Cannon and Annie Marie Gilbert. Your nurturing, love, and encouragement have greatly contributed to the man that I am today.

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I thank God for giving me the ability to complete the process of writing this dissertation. I give honor to my lord and savior Jesus Christ, for providing me with his love and grace, that enables me to have the opportunity to serve students that are in need of love and grace. God, I have been able to write this dissertation only, because of your enduring grace, love and guidance. I pray that this study is used to support students that are in dire need of enduring grace, love and guidance.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The need for alternative learning interventions for at-risk students is in high demand (Ballard, 2022). There has been a significant shift in student behaviors and academic performance in recent years. There are several causes for this shift. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools and school districts have witnessed a major change in student behavior and academic performance (Ashta et al., 2023). School suspension rates and dropout rates have increased as students struggle with the traditional practices of public schools (Casazza, 2021). An increase in mental health concerns has led to more students struggling academically in school. Students that are challenged with mental health concerns are more likely to struggle academically in school (Agnafors et al., 2021). Furthermore, traumatic experiences for school aged children have been more prevalent in the last two decades (Carlson et al., 2020). Traumatic experiences for school aged children can affect their progress in school. Struggles with mental health can be linked to traumatic childhood experiences, resulting in an increase in poor academic performance and repeated discipline offenses in school (Ray et al., 2020).

Alternative learning takes on many forms and looks different in various districts in eastern North Carolina, the location of this inquiry. One form of alternative learning is online learning for students that struggle in the traditional setting. Other alternative learning programs (ALPs) provide students with learning opportunities in a restrictive setting. Some school districts do not have an official ALP that is provided to students. However, there has been an increase in the number of students that are considered to be at risk. Alternative learning interventions allow school districts to provide students with the opportunity to be successful, despite the varying factors that hinder their progress in school (Harris, 2022).

At-risk students are those students that are in jeopardy of not being successful in school due to poor academic performance and repeated discipline offenses (Lu et al., 2021). Furthermore, at-risk students are also considered to be those students that are likely to drop out of school and not graduate from high school (Lee & Jae, 2019). There are several factors that lead to students being considered at-risk. One primary factor that can lead to student dropout is excessive out-of-school suspensions due to repeated discipline offenses. Poor academic performance can also be a factor that leads to student dropout (Vaughn et al., 2020). Exposing at-risk students to sound alternative learning interventions will combat the factors that hinder student progress in school (Harris, 2022). Alternative learning interventions have been proven to be effective in addressing graduation rates and decreasing student dropout rates (Lee & Jae, 2019).

Many schools and school districts have developed and implemented ALPs that provide at-risk students with the opportunity to be successful. One common practice of traditional schools that is used to support student learning and misbehavior is the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework. The MTSS framework is designed to expose students to various interventions that will support an improvement in academic performance or behavior.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions and experiences of staff, students and parents after integrating the MTSS framework as an alternative learning intervention for students who are at-risk of not being successful in school and who attend the Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning (MNAS-ALP). The alternative learning interventions were integrated using the MTSS framework and analyzed for their effectiveness on students that are at-risk of not being successful in school. The interventions that have shown to be effective were then implemented at the Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative

Learning (MNAS-ALP) in the Eastern County School district. Focus groups and interviews with staff, students and parents at the MNAS alternative learning program were used to investigate the experiences and perceptions of MTSS framework interventions.

Background of the Study

Schools and school districts have historically implemented alternative learning strategies or programs that are found to be successful. As a result, school districts tend to put all their efforts into ensuring that the entire organization fully implements these practices with fidelity (Combs et al., 2022). This establishes a pattern that encourages school districts to work hard at something that has been proven to increase the success of its students. Many school districts have worked hard to research best practices that are proven to be successful for schools and more importantly, their students. One problem that grows out of this practice is that many schools and school districts take a “one size fits all” approach to implementing programs aimed at increasing student success (Gentry, 2006). These programs are designed with the mindset that they will apply one strategy or intervention to all students and address all student needs. Many students are placed into these programs without having the opportunity to be assessed on what they truly need for success (2006). One example of this practice is when school districts also apply the same approach to increasing parent engagement without realizing that all parents do not have equal access to time (Posey & Haley, 2021).

One example of the “one size fits all” approach is the No Child Left Behind Act that was voted into law in 2002. The No Child Left Behind Act aimed at addressing stronger and more equitable instructional practices for students all over the country. The effectiveness of these instructional practices was measured by the results of standardized testing (Jimerson, 2005). The No Child Left Behind Act addressed one issue by ensuring that all students received the highest

quality instruction in the core areas of English, Math, Science and Social Studies. However, one negative result of the No Child Left Behind Act, is that it forced many school districts to focus on the core subject areas while also cutting back on Arts and Career and Technical programs (Fletcher, 2006). The effects of NCLB were felt in the state of North Carolina. According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) annual report, 1,370 more students dropped out of school between the 2005 and 2006 school years (NCDPI, 2001). “North Carolina recorded 10,841 dropouts in high school Grades 9-12 for the 2021-2022 school year, a 14.0% increase from the 9,512 reported in 2018-2019, a 3.0% increase from the 10,523 reported in 2017- 2018” (NCDPI, 2023 p. 88). The effects of the NCLB legislation shows a great need to shift from using “one size fits all programs” to programs that provide tailored support for students that are struggling in school.

School districts often take a one size fits all approach to implementing student centered programs (Posey and Haley, 2021). The results of these programs can show an improvement for one subgroup of students while the needs of other subgroups are not addressed. Programs must be implemented to ensure that students from all backgrounds have equitable access to program resources and interventions (Mahoney et al., 2021). There is a great need for equitable alternative learning interventions that will work to support students with individual needs (Lipman, 2023). These types of programs will ensure that all students have access to academic interventions and supports.

There has been an increase in the number of students across the country who are suspended from school, and an overall increase in the number of students that are long-term suspended from school (Casazza, 2021). The trends of increased suspensions can also be seen in the state of North Carolina. According to the NC DPI annual report on discipline, “the 2021-

2022 short-term suspension rate of 146.57 per 1,000 students increased by 11.9% from 130.95 per 1,000 students in 2018-2019” (NCDPI, 2022 p. 15). The NCDPI annual report also showed that long-term suspensions increased in 2022 by 23.3% compared to 2018-2019 and 6.3% compared to 2017-2018 (NCDPI, 2023). The increased number of students with disabilities has also affected how schools provide support and programming for students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or Section 504 Plans (Otradovec, 2021). Alternative schools and programs have seen an increase in the number of students with disabilities that are referred to their schools and programs. According to the NCDPI annual report, students with disabilities accounted for 20.2% of all students that were referred to alternative learning programs in the 2021-2022 school year (NCDPI, 2023).

The state of North Carolina has reported upward trends in short term suspensions, long term suspensions and student dropouts from the 2017-2018 school year to the 2021-2022 school year. Short term suspensions are those out of school suspensions that are 9 days or less in length. Long term suspensions are those suspensions that are 10 days or more in length. Despite these upward trends, the NCDPI annual report showed a decrease in the number of students that were referred to alternative learning programs. Typically, students that are referred to alternative learning programs, are referred for repeated discipline offenses. These offenses often result in excessive out of school suspensions. The NCDPI annual report shows that there was a 23.2% decrease in the number of students that were referred to alternative learning programs from the 2017-2018 school year to the 2021-2022 school year. The increase in at-risk factors of suspensions and school dropout, show a great need for alternative learning interventions. This data also shows a greater need for schools to utilize alternative learning programs for students that are displaying early signs of at-risk behavior.

Alternative learning program designs can vary across school districts. Each individual district implements different ALP models based on what they feel is the best way to support students that struggle with academics and behavior in traditional school settings (Kumm et al., 2020). The first task that comes with implementing an ALP design, is to determine how students will be referred to the program. Most ALPs have students that are referred to them as a result of repeated discipline offenses (Kumm et al., 2020). These students often complete course work through face-to-face classes or through an online course program that is self-paced. The duration of time that students are enrolled at an ALP can vary. Students are either referred for the duration of the year or for the remainder of their time in high school.

For this study, I focused on the Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning program (MNAS-ALP) design. In the Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning Program (MNAS-ALP), students can be referred for repeated discipline offenses. Students can also be referred to the program that have committed egregious offenses and have been recommended for long-term suspension. These students are allowed to enroll in the program by the school district in lieu of being long-term suspended for the remainder of the school year. Students can also be referred for dropout prevention purposes. These students are typically behind in their high school graduation credits and come to the program to recover failed courses. These students complete these courses in Edgenuity, which is the online format for course delivery (Imagine Learning, 2024). Students are also referred to the program through parent request. Students that enroll through parent requests come on a voluntary basis. These students are often those students that have been successful in the program in the past, and their parents request for them to continue.

Context of the Study

This study was conducted within the Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning program (MNAS-ALP) that is located within the Eastern County School District. Eastern County Schools is located in the eastern region of the state of North Carolina. There are approximately 25,000 students enrolled in Eastern County Schools. Eastern County Schools is the 10th largest school district in the state of North Carolina.

The Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning (MNAS-ALP) is Eastern County Schools' official program for alternative learning. MNAS-ALP serves students in grades K-12. There is one class that serves Elementary students. The Elementary alternative classroom houses a Kindergarten through 2nd grade teacher and a 3rd through 5th grader teacher. The Elementary classroom serves an average of six students.

Eastern County Schools has six traditional middle schools and seven K-8 schools that serve middle school grades. The MNAS-ALP serves students from all of the traditional Middle and K-8 schools. There are two classrooms that serve Middle School students at the MNAS-ALP. Each Middle School classroom has two certified teachers and one teacher assistant that serves students in 6th through 8th grade. Each classroom serves an average of 15 students.

Eastern County Schools has six traditional high schools. High school students are served in three classrooms at MNAS-ALP. Students are referred to the MNAS-ALP from all 37 base schools for various reasons. Students can be referred to the MNAS-ALP for discipline violations, pending felonies, parent referrals or if they are being released from a locked facility. A locked facility is any facility that houses students for mental health support or criminal offenses. Mental hospitals, youth development camps and juvenile detention centers are all considered locked facilities that may house students.

Students that are released from locked facilities like mental hospitals or detention centers are only required to do a 10-day transition period at the MNAS-ALP, before returning to their base school. Students are also referred for multiple discipline violations that result in long-term suspensions. The MNAS-ALP provides three Tiers of support for students. The Tier 1 program serves students from 8:30am to 1:30pm. The Tier 2 program serves students from 2:30pm to 4:30pm Monday through Friday. The Tier 3 program serves students that are totally virtual and are working from home (see Figure 1). Students are enrolled into the MNAS-ALP based on grade level, and best fit for virtual or face to face learning (see Table 1).

Students at the MNAS-ALP work on an online program called Edgenuity to complete course work. Edgenuity is a self-paced online course program that allows students to complete all required core courses (Imagine Learning, 2024). Students are enrolled at the MNAS-ALP for a semester or for the entire school year. There are 25 total staff members that serve students at the MNAS-ALP. The staff at the MNAS-ALP is made up of 12 certified teachers, seven teacher assistants, two school counselors, a school nurse and school social worker. The program also has one coordinator and an administrator that manages the alternative learning program for East County Schools.

Many of the high school students that are enrolled at the MNAS-ALP are behind academically. Due to repeated discipline issues, absences and poor academic performance, many of these students have fallen out of their graduation cohort classes. Much of the academic work is focused on recovering credit for courses that students have previously failed. The poor academic performance of these students can be directly tied to the discipline and attendance, as students fail to complete their high school requirements for graduation. One of the main goals of

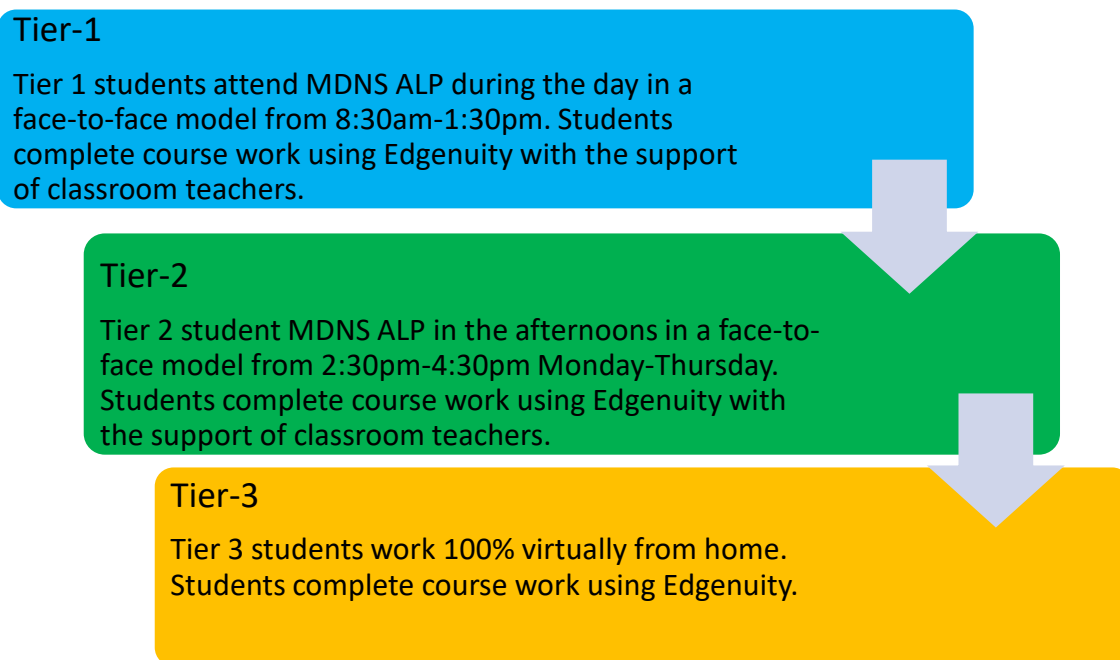


Figure 1. Meeting The Needs of All Students ALP Tier Model.

Table 1

Student enrollment at the Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning Program

<u>Student Capacity</u>	<u>Placement</u>
15	(High School 1)
14	(High School 2)
15	(High School 3)
14	(Middle School 1)
13	(Middle School 2)
6	(Elementary)
12	Tier 2 (T2)
50	Tier 3 (Virtual)

the MNAS-ALP is to support students in earning high school credit to ensure that they graduate from high school.

The aim of this study was to use the MTSS framework to examine how MTSS interventions and supports can improve the success of at-risk students in the MNAS-ALP. The Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework was designed to support students with making progress academically through progress monitoring (Wakerle-Holloman et al., 2021). The belief is that the MTSS framework would be an appropriate framework to implement at Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning Program, due to the prevalent academic and behavior struggles of the students that are being served within the program.

Statement of the Problem of Practice

This focus of practice was to address at-risk students not succeeding in traditional high school settings. The aim of this study was to examine the perceptions and experiences of staff, students and parents after integrating the MTSS framework as an alternative learning intervention for students who are at-risk of not being successful in school and who attend the Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning Program. Several factors that lead to students being considered at-risk were identified. Repeated discipline violations, out of school suspensions and poor academic performance are all factors that could lead to students being considered at risk of not succeeding in school (Gottfried & Ansari, 2022). Exposing these students to the MTSS framework measured how effective the framework was in ensuring the success of students that are enrolled in an alternative learning program.

Research has shown that students that have poor academic performance are at risk of not succeeding in school (Simeon et al., 2020). There are several factors that lead to students not performing well in school. Academic struggles could stem from students having low reading and

math levels (Scammacca et al, 2020). This could lead to the need for more support in the form of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) or Section 504 plans. Oftentimes the lack of recognition of student support needs, leads to students being profoundly behind academically.

There are other variables that lead to poor academic performance like poor home environments (Krauss et al., 2020). Many students come from home environments that lead to trauma or traumatic events that greatly affect their ability to focus or perform academically in school (Jerrim et al., 2021). There is a greater need to support these students mentally and emotionally. Students that have been affected by traumatic experiences require a full range of support interventions that support them mentally, emotionally and academically (Jerrim et al., 2021). The mental health of these students must be supported and addressed in order for them to truly focus on their academic requirements. Students that have experienced trauma are often supported in the Tier 2 and Tier 3 phase of the MTSS framework. These students are supported through school based cognitive behavior therapy that is provided by a trained psychologist or therapist (Gee et al., 2020).

The factors of poor academic performance, unstable home environments and traumatic experiences can all lead to negative student behavior (Gottfried & Ansari, 2022). These at-risk factors cause students to struggle in school and to eventually avoid school (Snipes, 2017). They can also cause students to misbehave in school. Negative student behavior is another way that at-risk students seek to avoid school (Snipes, 2017). The avoidance of school and misbehavior both lead to high absenteeism (Gottfried & Ansari, 2022). Students are continually absent due to avoiding school or because they are suspended due to repeated discipline violations. All of these at-risk factors are apparent in students enrolled in MNAS-ALP.

During the 2022-2023 school year for Eastern County Schools, there was an increase in the number of out of school suspensions. During this time 421 students were referred to the MNAS-ALP. Furthermore in 2023-2024 there was a 14% increase in the number of students referred to MNAS-ALP program than the previous school year. These factors suggest that there is an overall need for more alternative options for students due to factors like poor academic performance, repeated discipline offenses and excessive out of school suspensions.

Therefore, this study examined the perceptions and experiences of staff, students and parents after integrating the MTSS framework as an alternative learning intervention for students who are at-risk of not being successful in school. Examining the integration of the MTSS framework assisted the MNAS-ALP administration in determining if the MTSS supports and interventions increased the success of at-risk students. These findings led to a better understanding of what supports are needed in an alternative learning program.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of staff members that are integrating MTSS interventions to at-risk students enrolled in the MNAS-ALP?
2. What are the perceptions and experiences of MNAS-ALP students, and the parents of ALP students that are being supported with MTSS interventions?
3. How does implementation of the MTSS framework influence the leadership skill development of the scholarly practitioner?

The inquiry questions used in this study sought to gain an accurate perspective on how effective the MTSS interventions were in regard to supporting our students academically. Question one sought to gain valuable information on the effects of the MTSS interventions by

analyzing the experiences of staff members that are implementing the MTSS Framework in our alternative program. Students are the focal point for the MTSS implementation, because our aim is to support our students in obtaining academic success. Students that are enrolled in alternative learning programs often struggle academically (Moore et al., 2020). This study was also used to assess the effectiveness of the MTSS framework for students that are enrolled in our ALP. My aim was to gain insight on the effectiveness of MTSS framework through the thoughts and opinions of staff, students and parents. Inquiry question 2 allowed me to glean valuable information on the experiences of parents and the students that received MTSS interventions and supports.

The MTSS Framework utilizes three tiers of support for instruction (Scott et al., 2019). The effect of each Tier's interventions was analyzed by measuring the positive gains students made when exposed to the various Tier interventions. Several data points were analyzed throughout the integration of the MTSS framework. In an academic sense, student success in an alternative program is often measured by the number of credits that are earned or recovered (Ballard & Bender, 2022). The instructional and behavioral support interventions of MTSS were assessed to better understand their effects on high school students while enrolled in our alternative learning program. This data allowed us to glean important data on how the staff, students and parents feel about the implementation of MTSS in our alternative program.

The implementation of the MTSS framework may have a positive impact on the leaders of the alternative learning program as scholarly practitioners. There has been a great deal of research on the MTSS framework, and its impact on student learning. School leaders all over the state of NC have worked to implement, maintain or refine their school's processes for implementing MTSS (Durrance, 2023). Each school's diverse student demographics present

different challenges that require schools to adjust and modify their MTSS interventions to ensure student success. Alternative learning programs historically take the approach of trying to support students where they are academically and behaviorally (Ballard & Bender 2022). Implementing the MTSS framework in an alternative setting will allow leaders to challenge the status quo process for supporting at risk students that are enrolled in alternative settings.

Overview of Study

To answer the questions guiding this study, I used the MTSS framework methodology with an explanatory sequential mixed methods design. This study research design used quantitative and qualitative data to analyze the experiences of staff, students and parents on the impact of MTSS interventions on at-risk students that are enrolled in an alternative learning program. I organized this study into three phases. Phase 1 provided details on the implementation plan for MTSS. Phase 2 detailed the final planning and implementation of the MTSS framework within our alternative learning program. Phase 3 provided information on the data collected from staff, students and parents on their opinions about MTSS interventions used on our alternative learning program.

Phase 1 of this study involved the planning for implementation of the MTSS framework. I worked with the collaborative inquiry partners to analyze student achievement. This data was cross referenced with research on the factors that lead to students being considered at-risk of not succeeding in school. The findings from the data analysis were used to support staff in forming connections with at-risk factors and the need for interventions to counteract those factors. The data was then utilized to inform and train the staff on the MTSS framework. Phase 1 also involved gauging the staff's understanding of MTSS. A survey was administered to provide insight and data on the thoughts and feelings of staff on students' ability and drive to be

successful in school. Phase 1 was finalized by working with collaborative inquiry partners to develop a plan of instructional and behavioral support for students utilizing the MTSS framework.

Phase 2 incorporated the continued planning and implementation of the MTSS framework. The implementation of MTSS required me and the inquiry partners to integrate the MTSS framework into the alternative program model. This in turn, required staff to align MTSS interventions and current alternative school interventions that were already in place. Phase 2 was finalized by the analyzing of data gathered from observations, Tier Meetings and Professional Learning Team Meetings (PLT). The process of collecting data transitioned into phase 3 of the inquiry. I worked with the collaborative inquiry partners to develop a plan to collect data on the experiences of staff, students and parents on the MTSS framework support and interventions. The final step of phase 3 collected qualitative data from staff, students and parents on the impact of the MTSS framework that was implemented in our ALP.

The participants that were involved in my study were staff, students and parents. The staff at our alternative learning program are vital to the success of our students in that they work closely with students daily. The staff members in our alternative program consist of teachers, support staff and administrators. The staff were key collaborative inquiry partners in that they implemented the MTSS framework and worked directly with students in the classroom. I invited staff to engage in my study through our common goal to support our students that often exhibit at-risk behaviors. This collaboration with staff came naturally through discussion, staff meetings and program initiatives. Students were the center piece for this study, in that the entire approach of this study is to address the issue of at-risk tendencies in students. Engaging students in this

study came through one on one, and whole group meetings. These meetings provided insight on how the staff provides support to increase student success.

I also met one-on-one with parents of the students that participated in this study. The goal was to collect the thoughts and opinions of parents on the impact of the MTSS interventions and supports on their children while enrolled in our ALP. Parental support for my study lessened any resistance to interventions or best practices for student support. I provided parents with a formal letter seeking permission to work with their child in this inquiry. I worked to maintain study rigor through constant communication and transparency with all participants. Clear communication allowed me to keep staff and students informed on progress and next steps for our MTSS implementation. I kept staff informed through routine staff meetings and observations. I kept students informed by meeting with them one-on-one to discuss their progress, and future plans for support. I kept parents informed by updating them on their child's progress instructionally as we work to immerse their children into various interventions.

Inquiry Partners

The collaborative inquiry partners included teachers, support staff and the administration team. Supporting students in being successful in school was the focus of this inquiry. Working with teachers, support staff and administration was essential to the process of the research, and the application of the MTSS Framework in gauging student success. Students are referred to the alternative program with the intention of having an opportunity to continue to earn credit towards graduation. The alternative program staff were valuable assets to this study in that they worked closely with the parents, students and base school staff to ensure that students were successful in our program. The counselors also partnered with the base schools to set goals for the student's behavior and academic progress.

Teachers and teacher assistants were essential inquiry partners in that they are the ones that worked with the students on a daily basis. They are the ones that implemented the MTSS framework from the ground level. Teachers and teacher assistants worked with students to support them by providing academic support at the Tier 1 level of our MTSS process. The teachers and teacher assistants also monitored student progress weekly to evaluate how students progressed through course work. The teachers and teacher assistants were key pieces in determining which students needed to be immersed in Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions of the MTSS Framework.

The MNAS-ALP program also has two school counselors and a social-workers that work as support staff for students that are enrolled in the program. The school counselors are not only responsible for enrolling students but also create graduation plans, and process completed courses when students finish a course in Edgenuity. The school counselors were vital to the implementation of the MTSS framework by providing students with tools and resources that support the areas that they struggle with both behaviorally and academically. The School Social Worker is also vital in that they provide food, clothes and other basic essentials that students are in need of. These resources allow the program staff to lessen the stress that students may deal with outside of school. The Social Worker also supports the staff with addressing student attendance issues.

The MNAS-ALP administration team were also important inquiry partners in that they facilitated and monitored the implementation of the MTSS framework. The administration team of the program is made up of the coordinator, program administrator and the instructional coach. The administrative team worked to facilitate professional learning communities with teachers to ensure they were effectively implementing interventions and monitoring the progress of our Tier

1 and Tier 2 students. The instructional coach facilitated the progress monitoring of our Tier 3 virtual students. The Director of Student Services was also a key inquiry partner in that they provided support and access to student resources, budget items, and support staff.

Data was reviewed, analyzed and discussed with all inquiry partners on a bi-weekly basis. Bi-weekly meetings were conducted to monitor all students by tier enrollment. Academic progress for each student was documented through meeting notes during the meetings. The social workers and the school counselors reported their data on courses completed, absences and any other pertinent data that may be affecting a student's progress. All of this data was cross referenced with the administration's data on student progression in courses completed, and student progress in Edgenuity. The team documented the findings of each student and prescribed interventions based on the academic or behavioral factors that were hindering student' progress. These meetings were documented using a google form that will allow all partners to see and input data.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that supported this study was the MTSS Framework. The MTSS framework requires school leaders and teachers to implement the framework with fidelity to ensure that students are progressing academically. Data driven interventions and strategies must also be prescribed and implemented properly to see progress in student learning.

One core practice of the MTSS framework is the use of evidence-based practices to improve the process by which we provide academic support for students (Freeman et al., 2015). The focus of improvement that was applied to this study is the improvement of academic performance and behavior for at-risk students. The MTSS framework is designed to immerse students into evidence-based strategies and interventions that support students with closing

academic gaps (Scott et al., 2019). Ultimately, the aim of this process was to improve the quality and effectiveness of instructional and behavioral interventions in the school setting.

This study aimed to effectively support at-risk students academically and behaviorally, by analyzing staff, student and parent perceptions of the MTSS framework within our alternative learning program. Traditionally, alternative schools have a developed set of protocols that seek to support students in their current academic and behavioral situations (Ballard & Bender, 2022). This study intended to research the impacts of how the MTSS framework will benefit students in alternative programs in their current situations, while also working to prepare them for the future.

Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms have been listed to provide understanding of alternative learning programs, and the aspects of the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework:

At-Risk Students-Students that have experienced struggles in school as a result of circumstances that have had negative effects on their social, emotional and intellectual growth (Beach, 2014).

Tier 1 Alternative Program Student - Tier 1 students are those students that attend the Meeting the Needs Program during the day from 8:30-1:30. The Tier 1 program provides the highest level on instructional support for students.

Tier 2 Alternative Program Student - Tier 2 students are those students that attend the Meeting the Needs Program after school traditional school hours from 2:30-4:30.

Tier 3 Alternative Program Student- Those students that are enrolled in the Meeting the Needs Program virtually. These students work completely off-site.

Edgenuity - is the online program that provides students with the courses they complete while enrolled in the Meeting the Needs Program (Imagine Learning, 2024).

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Framework-A tiered system of support interventions that are aimed at improving student academic and social emotional performance (Blackburn & Witzel, 2018).

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)-A tiered system of support aimed and preventing and improving student behavior (Kittelman et al., 2018).

MTSS Tier 1 Interventions - The first level of instructional strategies that students are exposed to within the MTSS Framework (Blackburn & Witzel, 2018).

MTSS Tier 2 Interventions - The second level support strategies that are utilized when students do not grasp initial concepts that are taught at the Tier 1 level (Blackburn and Witzel, 2018).

MTSS Tier 3 Interventions - Intense supports that are provided for students that have not responded to Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions (Blackburn & Witzel, 2018).

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, it was assumed that all base schools had fully implemented the MTSS framework. While the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) initiated the full implementation of MTSS in 2020 (Wilson, 2023), it was assumed that teachers at the base schools have a solid understanding of the MTSS framework Tier levels, and how to prescribe the appropriate interventions for each Tier. School districts provided training to school level staff in order to fully implement the MTSS framework in every school. It was assumed that all school leaders and staff are effectively implementing the MTSS framework. Additionally, it is assumed that base schools have no control of the socio-economic status of students, or their learning ability. We assumed that all students do not have the same approach to learning. Students also have varying circumstances that may have a significant impact on their ability to

learn or behave in school. It is assumed that schools may not be fully aware of the individual circumstances of students.

Furthermore, it was assumed that base schools provided varying levels of support for students that are considered at-risk of not succeeding in school. It was assumed that parents were fully involved and were effectively partnering with schools to support students. It was also assumed that base schools have properly assessed each student's needs before referring them to an alternative program. It was also assumed that base school leaders were aware of all the services that are provided to support students in the form of instructional interventions and school-based therapy. It was assumed that all staff at the alternative learning program believed that all students can be successful when they are exposed to the MTSS framework. It was also assumed that the staff at the alternative learning program were knowledgeable about the MTSS framework.

Scope and Delimitations

The design of this study was to analyze the experiences of staff members, students and parents on the impact of the MTSS framework in our alternative program. My study focused on the impact the MTSS framework will have on select high school students by analyzing staff, student and parent perceptions on the MTSS interventions that were utilized in our alternative learning program. My study also engaged teachers and support staff that work with our high school students. Several staff members consented to participating in this study. These staff members include three high school teachers, two school counselors, one instructional coach, one school social worker, one school nurse, one teacher assistant and the program administrator. My study identified 9 high school students that were in grades 9th through 12th that were enrolled in our alternative program. In order to collect and maintain consistent data, I worked with staff

members that are familiar with our program's culture. It was my hope to minimize the skewing of any data in my study by providing staff members with sound training and resources to ensure their understanding of the MTSS framework.

Working with veteran staff members allowed me to conduct my study seamlessly. Staff members that were familiar with our alternative program's processes and procedures, were better able to implement the MTSS framework for our students. Having a working knowledge of our program processes allowed veteran staff members to adjust to any changes that the study brought about. Veteran staff members are also familiar with the students that are enrolled in our alternative learning program. This familiarity gave our veteran staff members a great working knowledge of what challenges and supports our students needed in regard to the MTSS framework.

One focus of my study analyzed the experiences of staff members that utilized MTSS framework interventions to support at-risk students that were enrolled in our alternative learning program. These students were considered at-risk for several reasons. The students that were enrolled in our alternative learning program, often have a history of repeated discipline violations. Other at-risk characteristics that we see with our students is high absenteeism, and poor academic performance.

High school students often come to the MNAS-ALP behind in their graduation requirement classes. Many of our students are behind due to their extreme academic struggles. This is the reason that I chose to measure the impact of the MTSS instructional interventions on select high school students that are enrolled in our program. The overall focus of my study was to examine how well the MTSS framework will be at supporting our students academically.

Limitations

There were several limitations that can be associated with this inquiry. The first limitation was that students constantly transition in and out of the alternative program. Student referrals are done consistently throughout the academic year with varying amount of time for students to be enrolled. The timing of a referral can impact the amount of time we have to truly expose a student to the MTSS framework. Limited enrollment time could skew any potential data that is collected. Another potential limitation is the student's lack of motivation to succeed in school. Oftentimes, the circumstances that students deal with outside of school greatly outweigh any academic or behavioral supports that are provided.

The students that are enrolled in our alternative program have to contend with biases that further hinder the progress of at-risk students. One bias that is associated with at-risk students, is that these students are a lost cause and cannot be successful in school. As a result of this bias, schools and school staff are not consistent in providing the academic and behavior support that at-risk students need. High dropout rates and out of school suspensions, are the by-products of low expectations, and the lack of intense support for at-risk students. It was the aim of this study to evaluate the impact of the MTSS framework supports on at-risk students enrolled in the alternative learning program.

Significance of the Inquiry

The Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning Program (MNAS-ALP) seeks to provide at-risk students with the opportunity to be successful in an environment different from the traditional school environment, where they were previously unsuccessful. This study focused on exposing at-risk students to the MTSS framework. This study also evaluated the impact that the MTSS framework has on students that were enrolled in our alternative

learning program. There has been an increase in the number of students that are suspended from school, dropped out of school and have consistently had poor academic performance in school (Casazza, 2021). Studies show that there is a growing trend of factors that are affecting student's ability to be successful in schools all over the country (Otradovec, 2021). These trends are leading to more students being considered at-risk of not being successful in school. This study reviewed and analyzed the strategies that were utilized at the MNAS-ALP to analyze their effect on students that have struggled in the traditional school setting.

The findings from this study have the potential to provide educators with strategies and interventions that will help them meet the needs of students that are at-risk of not succeeding in school. All too often, students that are referred to alternative settings are behind academically (Korpershoek et al., 2020). Many have fallen out of their respective cohort graduation classes due to poor academic performance. The poor academic performance of at-risk students is often the result of repeated discipline offenses, and high absenteeism (Korpershoek et al., 2020). It is my hope that this study will provide sound data on how best to serve at-risk students that are enrolled in alternative learning programs.

Advancing Equity and Social Justice

This study impacts issues of equity in that it addressed the need to serve students who have been historically underserved in the public educational system. The vast majority of the at-risk students that are referred to the MNAS-ALP program, are minority students. African American males and females represented 97% of the MNAS-ALP program enrollment in the 2022-2023 school year. These trends align with the suspension numbers, dropout numbers, and the number of students that under achieve in the Eastern County School District. These students

also come from low socio-economic environments, and many of the factors of their behaviors are a result of their environment (Krauss et al., 2020).

Another population this study impacts, are students with disabilities who are also considered underserved in the traditional school setting (Otradovec, 2021). Oftentimes, these students are expected to adapt to the school environment, when the school should be also adapting to meet the student's needs as a disabled person. Educators have a moral responsibility to research the best methods and interventions to combat these trends that have negatively affected minority students for years. The data collected may provide a blueprint on how to support at-risk students being successful in school. Especially since many of these at-risk students represent an underserved population. Underserved populations of students are those students that fall into the statistical category as minority students and historically underperform in school.

The need for alternative learning interventions is at an all-time high in our schools. There are growing numbers of students that are not succeeding in the traditional school setting due to discipline issues, poor academic performances or disabilities (Korpershoek et al., 2020). This study will analyze the effects of interventions that are utilized at the MNAS-ALP Alternative Learning Program within the Eastern County School district. A goal of the study was to determine best practice interventions, that prove to be effective in helping at-risk students succeed in school.

Advances in Practice

There are growing numbers of students that are not succeeding in the traditional school setting due to discipline issues, poor academic performances or disabilities (Casazza, 2021). This study analyzed the staff, student and parent perceptions of MTSS interventions that are utilized

at the Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning Program within the Eastern County School district. Findings from this study may provide best practice MTSS interventions, that prove to be effective in helping at-risk students succeed in school.

This study may encourage other school leaders to incorporate the MTSS framework in alternative learning programs. All school districts have different approaches to alternative education and vary in what alternative education looks like in their respective districts. It is my hope that this study will provide a blueprint for alternative educators to use to support students in being successful in school. Exploring the impact on the MTSS framework could pay huge dividends in the effort to increase the number of at-risk students that are successful in school.

Providing students with the opportunity to improve in their behavior and academic performance could be very impactful for future students. Exploring the effects of MTSS framework interventions on student performance, could lead to an increase in the number of students that are exposed to the MTSS framework. The MTSS interventions could prove to be a sound strategy that is utilized to combat the increase of at-risk students in traditional and alternative schools.

Summary

Chapter 1 provided an overview of how student support needs have shifted over the past several decades. There are a greater number of students that require alternative learning interventions and supports to ensure their success in school. The increase in traumatic experiences for students has led to an increase in struggles with mental illness, behavior and their overall academic progress. These factors are what lead to students being considered at-risk of not succeeding in school. Schools and school districts must evolve in their approach to support students with their individual needs. This support must come in the form of prescribed

interventions that meet the individual needs of all students. Especially those students that are considered to be at-risk, and identify with minority subgroups.

Chapter 2 of this study will delve into a review of literature to provide a clear picture of various ALP interventions and supports. Chapter 2 will also provide background on at-risk factors that lead to struggles for students in traditional school settings. I will use the literature review to make a connection between at-risk student needs, and the various MTSS interventions that could be used to support them.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a framework that provides students with supports and interventions to ensure that students succeed academically and behaviorally. Educators utilize the MTSS framework to develop researched based strategies and interventions to support students with learning lesson concepts, behavior and other factors that may hinder a student's progression in school. The purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of implementing MTSS within an alternative learning program. The focus of this study analyzed the experiences of staff members that provided the MTSS interventions and supports for students that were enrolled in the Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning Program.

The need for alternative learning programs, correlates with the need to serve students who are considered to be "at risk" (Posey & Haley 2020). The need for alternative learning schools and interventions has increased, as school districts work to accommodate the various learning needs of students (Dameron et al., 2019). The need for increased support for at-risk students provides background on the reason for this chapter's focus to identify the factors that lead students to be considered at-risk.

There are several factors that lead to students being considered at risk of not being successful in school. An increase in out of school suspensions, low academic success and the effects of unstable home environment can have an impact on school performance. Students that have repeated discipline offenses often accumulate an overwhelming amount of suspension days out of school (Islam, 2021). These students are often referred to alternative schools due to their repeated discipline offenses (Aurini & Davies, 2021).

This literature review presents research that analyzes the impact of alternative learning interventions that are utilized to combat the factors that lead to students being considered at risk.

Furthermore, the effects of alternative interventions like credit recovery options, exposure to career and technical education and online learning will be presented. An in depth look at the MTSS Framework interventions and supports will provide greater clarity on the reasoning and intention for the various alternative learning interventions commonly used within alternative learning programs.

Theoretical Framework

The MTSS framework is designed to address the needs of students that present gaps in learning and behavior while in school. Students are exposed to the MTSS framework interventions to support them in closing learning and behavior gaps. The MTSS framework utilizes tiered supports and interventions to support students in growing academically and behaviorally (Wakerle-Holloman et al., 2021). There are correlations between student learning/behavioral gaps and at-risk factors that students may have experienced (Lee & Jae, 2019). At-risk factors such as trauma, poor academic performance, and repeated discipline violations can lead to students being at-risk of not being successful in school (Islam, 2021).

Majority of the students that are enrolled in alternative learning programs can identify with at least one at-risk factor that has hindered their progress in school. Students that enroll in alternative learning programs, often enroll due to discipline violations and are academically behind. As a result, alternative learning programs must work with a sense of urgency to support students in closing gaps that are the result of at-risk factors. The MTSS framework is commonly used to address student needs within traditional school settings. This literature review will take an in depth look into at-risk students, traditional alternative learning program practices and how the MTSS framework fits into alternative learning programs.

At-Risk Students

An At-Risk student is a student who is at risk of not meeting academic or social expectations (Lu et al., 2021). These two factors can lead to students being at risk of not graduating from high school (Lee & Jae, 2019). There are several factors that lead to students being considered to be at a higher risk of not being successful in school. One characteristic of an at-risk student is a student who has poor academic performance (Casazza, 2021). Oftentimes, students struggle with learning concepts and score poorly on tests. These students could have several factors that can hinder the learning process. One main cause of poor academic performance is learning disabilities (Butler & De La Paz, 2021). Many students struggle to learn lesson concepts due to a learning disability. Students all over the country have been diagnosed with low IQ scores and struggle with reading and math (Butler & De La Paz, 2021). Without the proper support at home and at school, many students have not been properly diagnosed with specific disabilities that hinder their learning. This lack of support and not recognizing the need for support causes students to struggle unnecessarily in school (Posey & Haley, 2020).

Students who struggle academically tend to have higher rates of discipline violations in school (Islam, 2021). Having academic struggles often forces students to avoid school, or act out in school to mask their inability to be successful in the school setting. Students who struggle academically tend to draw attention away from their academic responsibilities by causing behavior disruptions in school (Casazza, 2021). As a result, students who struggle academically develop a pattern of repeated discipline violations in school (Casazza, 2021). These discipline violations often lead to students being suspended for long periods of time, and eventually expelled from school (Islam, 2021).

Students that are considered to be at risk of not being successful in school often come from low socio-economic homes (Welsh, 2018). Students who come from low socio-economic homes often lack the support and resources needed to ensure success in school. Students who are considered poor are more likely to struggle with reading and math (Kirkoen et al., 2021). Students who come from low-socio economic homes often start school behind in reading and math as compared to their peers that come from middle to upper class home environments (Kirkoen et al 2021). Low socio-economic neighborhoods tend to have high crime rates that coincide with the high poverty rate. These environments can have effects on students socially and emotionally. The stress of poverty that presents itself in the lives of students often distracts them and hinders their focus on school (Welsh, 2018).

Students that are at-risk of not being successful in school often have high absenteeism from school (Sosu et al., 2021). One of the leading causes of student dropout is excessive absences from school (Lee & Jae, 2019). When students are absent, they are not able to consistently learn key instructional concepts. The lack of being exposed to instruction at school also leads to the development of learning gaps in the areas of reading and math (Kirkoen et al., 2021). Many school districts have implemented graduation coaches and attendance specialist to help combat the issue of high student absences from school.

Each of these factors can be connected to other negative factors, and can potentially cause students to not be successful in school. The primary goal for schools is to graduate as many students as possible from high school. The factors that lead to students being at-risk are identified in this study, and are all major contributors to the reasons why students are not successful as high school graduates. It is believed that students that are considered at-risk, are in

need of alternative learning interventions to combat the effects of these factors on their educational success (Sekhar et al., 2023).

Alternative Learning

Alternative learning is the process of providing students with the opportunity to succeed in an alternative setting using non-traditional interventions (Nichols & Utesch 1998). Alternative learning interventions are typically provided for students that struggle in the traditional setting, and are at risk of not succeeding in the traditional school environment (Posey & Haley 2020). The criteria by which at-risk students enroll in alternative learning programs can vary. Students are often enrolled in alternative learning programs as a result of repeated discipline offenses. These students have a documented history of being problematic and disruptive in the traditional school setting. These repeated discipline violations often lead to suspension or expulsion from the traditional school setting. Students who are unsuccessful academically in the traditional setting are typically seen as candidates for alternative learning programs (Fabes et al., 1994).

Alternative learning programs provide an array of options for students to learn, and be successful. Smaller class sizes are common in alternative programs (Dameron et al., 2019). Many students experience difficulties in the traditional school setting where there are large numbers of students in attendance (Dameron et al., 2019). Alternative learning programs also offer flexible class schedules. Students that struggle in the traditional school setting, often benefit from having their schedule tailored to benefit their learning style and learning needs (Dameron et al., 2019). Alternative learning programs also offer flexible graduation requirements for at-risk students.

Additional resources and support services are also provided for at risk students that are enrolled in alternative learning programs. Many at-risk students have been diagnosed with a

mental illness or a disability (Na et al., 2023). These students are often supported by counselors and therapists in the alternative school setting. Social workers are also utilized in alternative learning programs. At-risk students tend to be considered of low socio-economic status, and reside in low socio-economic environments. Social Workers provide the resources and support for students that help meet the basic needs of these students in school and in their homes (Dameron et al., 2019). Alternative learning programs are designed to provide at-risk students with the opportunity to be successful in school while working to meet their needs, instructionally, physically and emotionally (Bloomfield et al., 2020).

Alternative learning options were first introduced in American public schools in the 1960s (Raywid, 1999). Early alternative learning programs were more prevalent in urban areas than rural ones. The aim of these urban alternative learning programs was to address delinquent minority youth who were not successful in the traditional school setting (Raywid, 1999). One benefit to alternative learning environments is that they offer smaller class sizes (Dameron et al., 2019).

Alternative learning programs had grown significantly by the 1970s (Meador, 2020). There were many models of alternative learning programs that all had their own philosophies and strategies about serving at risk students. There were three different approaches utilized by alternative learning programs in the 1970s. One approach of some alternative learning programs was a focus on changing the student (Meador, 2020). The goal of these programs was to create a shift in the at-risk student's behavior and approach to their education. The initial approach for the "Change the Student" model represented a last chance for students that were not able to be successful in the traditional school setting. Other alternative schools utilized the "Change the Student" approach with more of a focus on therapeutic and emotional supports (Meador, 2020).

Another approach that some alternative schools utilized was the “Change the School” model approach. These “Change the School” model alternative schools provided their students with a positive school climate that utilized unorthodox practices to ensure the success of their students (Raywid, 1999). One example of the “Change the School” model was the Harlem Prep alternative school located in Harlem New York. The Harlem Prep School utilized community engagement, character education, the arts and entertainment to provide support for their at-risk students (Goldenburg, 2023).

The shift in alternative learning during the 1980s was one that focused on the remediation of students that struggled academically and behaviorally (Hamilton, 1981). The approach of educators in this era of alternative education, was based on their reaction to the overwhelming number of students that struggled to be successful in the mainstream school setting. The 1990s and early 2000s saw a shift to more diverse options for alternative learning schools and programs (Lange & Sletten, 2002). As a result, present day alternative schools and programs have evolved into one of three types of programming for students. Type 1 alternative schools and programs focus on the aspect of choice. These types of programs fall into the category of magnet schools or other programs designed to encourage student enrollment. Type 2 alternative schools and programs are designed around the last chance model for students that are struggling with behavior and other academic struggles. Type 3 alternative schools and programs are geared toward academic, social and emotional remediation for students (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

The success of alternative schools has been driven by several factors throughout the history of American public education. The varying needs of students have pushed educators to develop and implement alternatives to mainstream educational settings (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Student needs have also evolved with the times. Students in the early 1960s needed equitable

access while students in the 70s and 80s needed more options for learning (Hamilton, 1981). Modern day students have presented a wide variety of needs, and societal practices have shifted. An increased need for social emotional support has required educators to give attention to students by providing unique alternatives to traditional education methods (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Several models of alternative schools were created out of the necessity to provide equal opportunity for children that needed equal access to learning. One example of this is the Tuskegee Institute that was founded in 1891 by Booker T. Washington. Tuskegee Institute was founded with the purpose of training African Americans in the fields of Teaching and Vocational Education after the Civil War (Bailey, 2016). Many alternative high schools were created with the same purpose of providing marginalized youth with the opportunity to have equal access to formal education (Shim & Krist, 2022). One example of this is the Virginia Randolph School. Virginia Randolph was an educator in the Henrico County School District in Virginia. She founded a one room school building where she recruited and taught African American students in vocational trades and core academics (Belsches, 2020). The Tuskegee Institute and the Virginia Randolph School are two examples of alternative school programs aimed at providing equal access to learning.

Much like the Tuskegee Institute and the Virginia Randolph School, modern day alternative schools have evolved into institutions that are geared to serve student needs. Students that attend public schools today are more diverse in their needs than ever before (Moreno, 2021). Booker T. Washington and Virginia Randolph are two educators who understood the need to provide students with the opportunity to learn vocational education for students that did not have equal access to formal education. Today's alternative schools provide varying levels of support

for students through vocational training, online learning and social emotional learning. (Posey, Haley 2020).

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

The Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework has been implemented to improve the academic and behavioral support that schools provide to at risk students (Wakerle-Holloman et al., 2021). The MTSS framework is designed to prescribe support for students based on the tier levels of each student. Each tier provides support at a more intense level to ensure that students can progress in their academics and behavior (Wakerle-Holloman, et al 2021). The state of North Carolina implemented the MTSS framework as tool for school improvement (Williamson, 2019). MTSS focuses on two major strands of support. One of those strands is a focus on student response to instruction (RTI) The second strand is a focus on Positive Behavior Supports and Interventions (PBIS; Morrison et al., 2021). Schools focus on both RTI and PBIS to provide support for students with their individual academic or behavioral needs. North Carolina's MTSS plan requires schools to implement a framework that address gaps caused by the need for support with academics, behavior and emotional support (NCDPI, 2023) (see Figure 2).

One major component of MTSS is Response to Instruction (RTI). RTI is measured by how well students retain lesson concepts (Morrison et al., 2021). Students are often assessed on lesson standards and objectives, and the assessment results are analyzed to gauge how proficient a student is on a particular lesson concept. Students are often provided support if they do not perform well on an assessment. Lesson concepts are often retaught and the students are

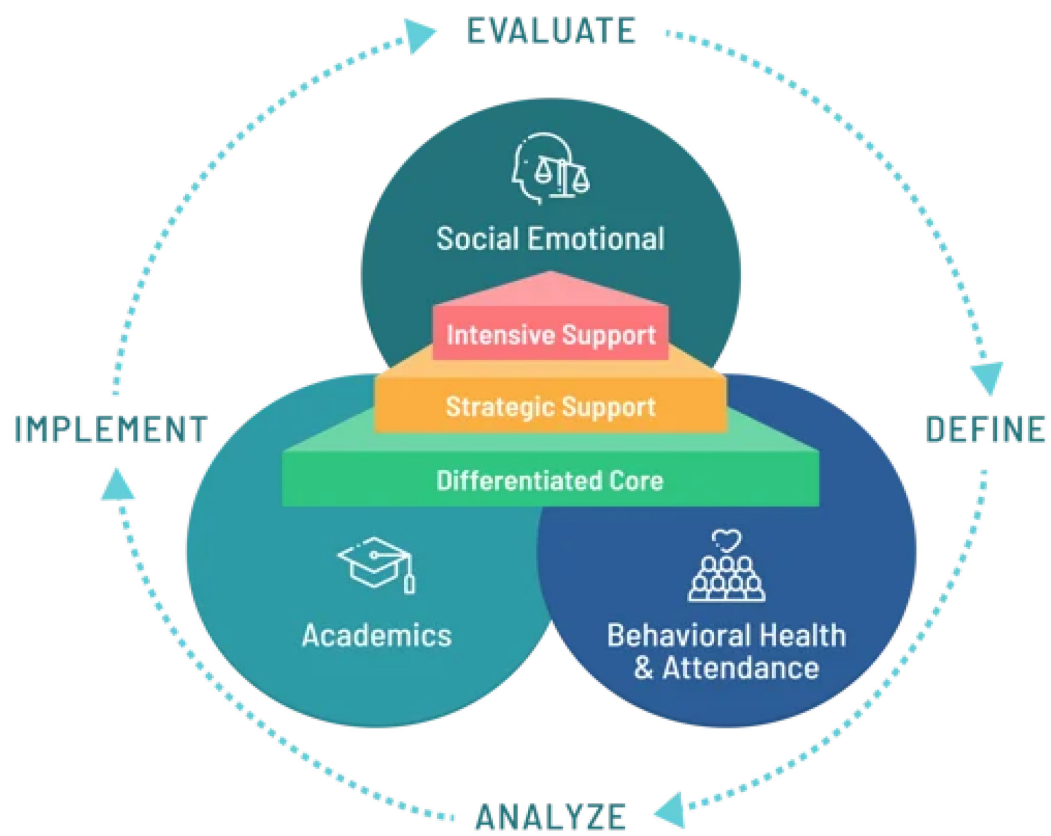


Figure 2. MTSS Focus of Support Areas.

reassessed to see if they retained the lesson concepts on the second time around. The goal of RTI is to ensure that all students are learning and retaining instructional content (Kovaleski et al., 2022).

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a major part of the MTSS framework that is aimed at supporting students with behavior interventions (Hollins-Simms et al., 2022). Repeated negative behavior hinders the learning process for students (Islam, 2021). PBIS is intended to offset negative behavior so that student learning is stable and consistent. Students are often identified by their pattern of behavior, and schools work to provide students with interventions that support the student in changing their behavior (Hollins-Simms et al., 2022). Schools implement school wide PBIS programs that are focused on creating a school environment that promotes positive behavior.

The MTSS framework interventions are driven by three Tiers of support. Branching Minds is an educational consulting company that supports school districts with MTSS implementation. According to Branching Minds (2024) the tiered framework begins with serving all students in Tier 1, while each higher Tier of support targets less students as targeted gaps are identified (see Figure 3). Branching Minds is a leading K-12 educational technology platform that was designed to support schools in doing the work of MTSS (Dundas and Sutton, 2017).

The Tier 1 level of interventions begin with the initial classroom instruction (Wilcher, 2022). Tier 1 level interventions are when students are first exposed to lesson concepts. Some examples of Tier 1 interventions are when a teacher first teaches a math lesson, or when a science teacher first teaches about the solar system. In the MTSS framework, all students are exposed to Tier 1 level of instruction (Wilcher, 2022). Tier 1 instruction is driven by state wide

standards and objectives. School districts often develop pacing guides to ensure that all schools are covering standards and objective on a uniform timetable.

Tier 2 interventions are implemented after schools have assessed students on lesson concepts that are taught at the Tier 1 level (Doll, 2019). Students are often assessed in a uniform manner when schools administer the same assessment to all students. These assessments are referred to as Common Formative Assessments (CFAs; Moss & Brookhart, 2019). CFAs are administered to ensure that the assessment data is consistent across several groups of students (Moss & Brookhart, 2019). Students that are exposed to Tier 2 interventions are those students that have been identified as not being proficient on a previously taught lesson standard (Doll, 2019). Tier 2 students are often exposed to interventions that support them in fully understanding lesson concepts. The Tier 2 students are then reassessed to gauge how well the interventions aided them in understanding lesson standards taught at the Tier 1 level (Doll, 2019).

Tier 3 students are those students that continue to struggle after being exposed to Tier 2 interventions (Moss & Brookhart, 2019). The MTSS framework requires schools to create problem solving teams to assist Tier 3 students with supports and interventions (Sims et al., 2023). The problem-solving teams are typically made up a several staff members that are licensed in a particular area. A school's problem-solving team could be made up of a school counselor, special education teacher and a core subject teacher. Each member brings their own level of expertise to ensure that they can contribute to the support of Tier 3 students (Moss & Brookhart, 2019). The Tier 3 process is the last level of interventions and supports for students within the MTSS framework (Sims et al., 2023). Students are then referred to the exceptional children's department for assessment if it is determined that more intensive interventions are needed to support a student (Moss & Brookhart 2019)

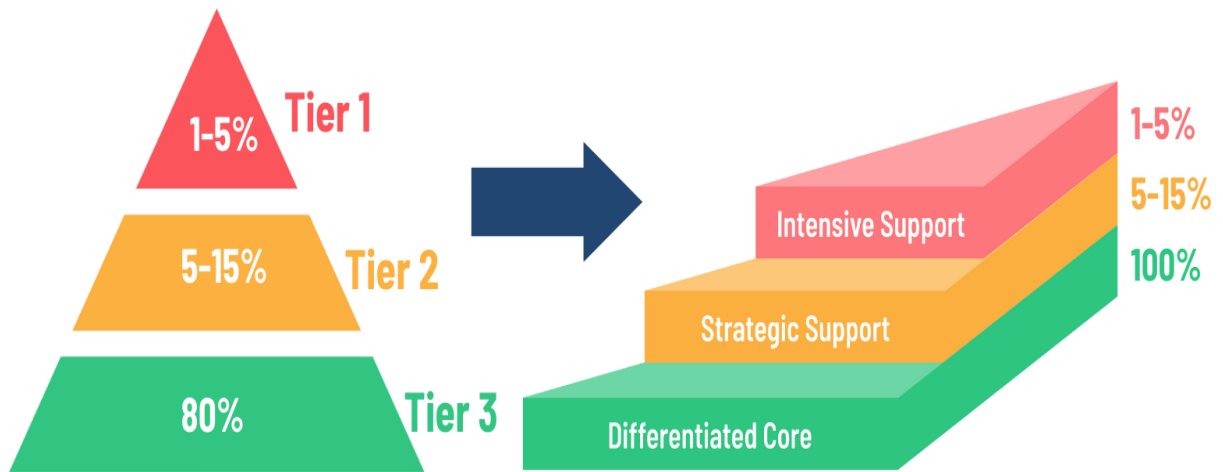


Figure 3. Branching Minds MTSS Tiers of Support.

MTSS in an Alternative Learning Program

There are three tiers of support that are used within the MTSS framework. The interventions and supports that are used for each tier can vary for students that are enrolled within an alternative learning program. Tier 1 interventions utilized within an ALP may consist of initial exposure to learning new concepts, social emotional learning and exposure to school-based therapy. Students may also have an assigned check in-checkout plan as a behavior management strategy. Interventions and supports for each tier may be different from those interventions utilized in the base schools. Students enrolled in ALPs oftentimes are hindered by at-risk factors that may require more intense supports earlier in the MTSS framework.

MTSS Tier 1 Interventions in an Alternative Learning Program

Tier 1 instruction is when students are first exposed to new lesson concepts. Within the MTSS framework, Tier 1 instruction takes place for all students at the same time (Scott et al., 2019). In an alternative school setting, Tier 1 instruction can take on many forms. Some alternative programs have a traditional school design in that they provide instruction face to face with teachers on a daily basis. Other alternative learning programs provide instruction using online course offerings that are self-paced through a learning management system (Jackson et al., 2024). Each Tier 1 method of instruction requires alternative learning educators to prepare for when students that do not grasp lesson concepts during initial exposure to students. Tier 1 interventions for alternative learning programs extend beyond teaching and learning lesson concepts. Alternative learning programs must also account for other factors that may hinder student growth. Alternative learning program staff must address academic gaps while also addressing the cause of the academic gaps. The potential causes of academic gaps for students

are trauma, misbehavior and other factors that cause students to be considered at risk (Casazza, 2021).

Social Emotional Learning Programs

In an alternative learning program Social Emotional Learning is considered a Tier 1 intervention (Viavattine, 2024). Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is currently at the forefront of how schools are working to support student's emotional needs (Williams, 2019). There has been an increase in the number of students that suffer from anxiety and other mental illnesses (Ohrt et al., 2020). These students are considered to be at risk because their mental and emotional well-being hinder their progress in school (Williams, 2019). Often times students that need support with SEL find it difficult to function in large school environments (Ohrt et al., 2020). The larger the school the more potential triggers may exist that affect students mentally, emotionally and physically.

The need for SEL to support students is caused mainly by trauma that students have experienced outside of school (Williams, 2019). The mental and emotional struggles of students can be connected to their Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) score (Reidy et al., 2021). A common task that all schools have is that they must deal with trauma related behaviors that manifest within the schools that are the result of events that may be happening outside of the schools. The increase in SEL support was well documented by schools after the Covid Pandemic (Aurini & Davies 2021). Students returned to school, after being exposed to their traumatic environments for the 18-month remote learning time span. As a result, there was an increase in behaviors and required support for students with SEL. Many school districts implemented system wide SEL practices to ensure that they were providing SEL support to all students (Aurini & Davies 2021).

North Carolina's MTSS strategic plan requires schools to address the five competencies of SEL (NCDPI, 2023). According to the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, (2024) schools must address the five competencies of SEL to properly support students within the MTSS framework (see Figure 4). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) works to provide the education community with strategies to integrate Social Emotional Learning to support students (Levin and Segev, 2023).

Students that require intense SEL support often display behaviors that hinder their progress in school (Williams, 2019). Oftentimes, these students can benefit from a smaller setting and are often referred to alternative schools. The smaller settings offer students a respite from the large settings that may trigger anxiety or behaviors. The smaller settings also allow students to better focus on their academics to ensure that they are progressing academically (Asim et al., 2020). Students that require SEL support also benefit from the one-on-one support that they can receive in the smaller setting (Aurini & Davies, 2021).

School Based Therapy

School based therapy is considered a MTSS Tier 1 intervention within an alternative learning program. Students who are enrolled alternative learning programs often have experienced trauma or struggle with mental illness (Viavattine, 2024). Schools have evolved in how they support students with SEL. School districts across the state are partnering with outside agencies to provide students with therapy support while attending school (Duong et al., 2021).

School based therapy is utilized by traditional and alternative schools to support students with SEL. Therapist are able to come into the school buildings to provide therapy services for students. Alternative schools have found that the smaller setting combined with the school-based

therapy is of great benefit to students (Garby, 2022). Students are able to get intensive SEL support while also progressing academically.

Check-In/Check-Out

Check-In/Check-Out is an intervention that is geared toward promoting positive behavior through routine feedback and increased positive interaction between staff members and students (Hackney et al., 2024). The aim of check-in/check-out is to promote the adherence to behavior expectations, and to minimize disruptive behaviors (Hackney et al., 2024). Check-In/Check-Out is typically a Tier 2 intervention in a traditional school setting (Hackney et al., 2024). However, Check-In/Check-Out would be a Tier 1 intervention within an alternative setting due to some students having documented struggles with behavior. The overall goal for alternative programs is to be proactive, rather than reactive in regard to addressing student behavior. The Check-in/Check-out intervention would provide staff members with the opportunity to support students with exhibiting consistent positive behavior to prevent any hinderance with learning.

Trauma Informed Practices and De-Escalation

The MTSS framework utilizes de-escalation strategies as a Tier 1 intervention when working with students that have traumatic experiences (Viavattine, 2024). Exposing alternative education staff to trauma informed practices are essential to supporting students that may struggle as a result of traumatic experiences. Staff members that serve in alternative learning programs must be knowledgeable about child hood trauma and be trained to use De-Escalation strategies. Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) is one example of de-escalation professional development that schools provide to their staff members (Zuniga and Cividini-Motta, 2021). Educators are often exposed to CPI training to prevent or minimize the crisis situations involving students. Students that experience trauma are more likely to have challenges



Figure 4. The Five Competencies of SEL.

in regard to regulating emotions and handling conflict (Reidy et al., 2021). An increased number of trained staff members will play a key role in minimizing any crisis situations that may disrupt learning for students.

MTSS Tier 2 Interventions in an Alternative Learning Program

There are tier 2 interventions and supports utilized in ALPs that are related to this study. Tier 2 interventions and supports are utilized when students do not grasp learned concepts at the tier 1 level of instruction (Doll, 2019). Several tier 2 interventions that are utilized with an ALP are one on one support, exposure to smaller learning environments, and flexible learning times. These tier 2 interventions are designed to provide students with support with learning and the right environment conducive to student learning needs.

One on One Support

Tier 2 MTSS interventions are interventions that are provided when students do not respond well to Tier 1 interventions (Viavattine, 2024). Staff members may identify the need for Tier 2 interventions from work samples, assessments or the lack of progress with coursework. One on one support is an MTSS Tier 2 strategy that can be utilized to supports students within an alternative learning program (Simonsen et al., 2022). The one-on-one support could consist of face-to-face time with a teacher, counselor or therapist. The support from a teacher could focus on subject content, and allow the students to receive academic support. The one-on-one support could also be provided from a support staff member (Simonsen et al., 2022). Supports for students that struggle with mental illness or behavior are equally important for student success within the MTSS framework.

Smaller Learning Environment

Providing students with a smaller learning environment or smaller group to work with, is an MTSS Tier 2 intervention for students enrolled in an alternative setting. Although Alternative schools initially provide offer smaller learning environments, some student needs may require an even smaller environment to be successful. Smaller learning environments have proven to be very effective for students that have struggled in larger school settings (Asim et al., 2020). At-risk students have access to more one-on-one support in a smaller setting. Large school settings present support staff with the challenge of filtering through hundreds of students to identity those that need support (Asim et al., 2020). It can also be challenging for support staff to effectively serve all the students that have needs in a large setting. A smaller alternative school setting lessens the challenge of reaching all of their students. School support staff like counselors, social workers and therapist can provide targeted support for students in a small school setting (Fernandez et al., 2021). Instructional staff can also provide effective support for students as they complete course work.

Flexible Learning Times in and Alternative Learning Program

One way that alternative learning programs can serve students that struggle in large groups is to provide them with flexible options for learning. Many alternative programs allow students to come into school afterhours when student numbers are smaller than during the day (Meacham, 2021). These twilight hours provide students with the opportunity be served that may struggle with being around larger groups of students. Alternative programs also provide students with the opportunity to learn virtually from home. Students who struggle with behavior, anxiety or mental illness greatly benefit from the smaller environments and remote learning. Many students are required to work due to their living situations at home. Flexible learning options

provide these students with the opportunity to maintain a steady work and school schedule. Flexible learning options are considered to be an MTSS Tier 2 intervention that can be utilized when students are struggling with the first level of instructional scheduling in an alternative learning program (Meacham, 2021).

MTSS Tier 3 Interventions in an Alternative Learning Program

There are tier 3 interventions and supports utilized in ALPs that are related to this study. Tier 3 interventions in and ALP may consist of intense one on one support, from teachers, health providers and support from the program's problem-solving Team. Tier 3 interventions are considered the most intense interventions within the MTSS Framework (Simonsen et al., 2022). Students that have not responded well to Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions are referred to the problem-solving team for intensive interventions and supports (Moss & Brookhart 2019). Students that are referred to the problem-solving team often struggle academically. These students tend to be significantly behind academically, and may require an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 plan. Students that are considered to be in the Tier 3 phase of the MTSS framework, may also exhibit intense behaviors that hinder the learning process. These behaviors may stem from mental illness, traumatic experiences or cognitive delays (Viavattine, 2024). As a result, these students are often provided with testing and assessments to determine if an IEP or 504 plan is needed to support the student academically and behaviorally.

One on One Support

Students that are receiving Tier 3 interventions often receive one-on-one support from school staff (Simonsen et al., 2022). Instructional support for students enrolled in an alternative learning program can come from teachers in the form of remediation. Remediation is the process of reviewing and reteaching content that students have failed to learn when initially taught

(Grasley-Boy et al., 2019). School support staff also provide one-on-one support for students receiving Tier 3 interventions. School Counselors, behavior therapist and school psychologist often work with students to provide one-on-one support (Weist et al., 2024). The support from these school support staff comes in the form of mentoring, therapy and utilizing strategies to minimize behavior.

Collaboration with Health Care Providers

When students are receiving Tier 3 interventions, they are exhibiting severe struggles with learning or behavior (Weist et al., 2024). School staff often seek to work with healthcare providers to gain insight on student struggles with their physical and mental health. Staff members also seek to work with therapists and school psychologist to development and implement interventions that support students with these struggles (Viavattine, 2024). Physicians, therapists and other health care providers are considered to be the experts in dealing with issues that cause students to struggle with school. School Nurses are vital to the traditional schools and alternative programs in how they support students that have school care plans. Alternative program staff can greatly benefit from collaborating with these professionals in order to support students.

Problem Solving Team

The problem-solving team is a key component of a school's MTSS framework. The problem-solving team serves to provide intensive services for students that are identified to receive Tier 3 supports and interventions (Murdoch, 2024). The members of the problem-solving team typically consist of a diverse group of educators with specific areas of training and expertise. It is important to have members that can provide support in the core subject areas to support any core academic needs that a student may have. Problem solving teams also consist of

having as an exceptional teacher that serves to identify areas of academic struggle and that is well versed in prescribing academic supports for students. The problem-solving team also works to support teachers in developing and utilizing interventions and supports for students across all Tiers (Murdoch, 2024) (see Figure 5).

MTSS Progress Monitoring

Progress monitoring is another major component of the MTSS framework. Schools often implement a system monitoring student progress to measure their growth or regression in learning lesson concepts (Freund et al., 2021). Effective progress monitoring is critical to the success of a school's MTSS framework. Students are often tracked throughout the school year in the areas of instructional assessments and behavior patterns (Freund et al., 2021). Progress monitoring gives schools a clear picture of how well they are supporting all students within the school.

The MTSS framework can be effectively applied to alternative schools. Students that are considered at-risk can greatly benefit from the academic and behavioral support that the MTSS framework provides (Doll, 2019). Students that are considered at-risk have historically been identified as students that have not responded well to the first level of instruction (Moss & Brookhart 2019). Students that are enrolled in alternative schools are typically considered to be behind academically, and can greatly benefit from progress monitoring (Freund et al., 2021).

The Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) framework can be very effective of supporting at-risk students (Hollingsworth, 2019). The majority of at-risk students are known to have a history of repeated discipline violations (Casazza, 2021). Exposing at-risk students to individual behavior supports will provide them with the support to improve in their academics (Freund et al., 2021).

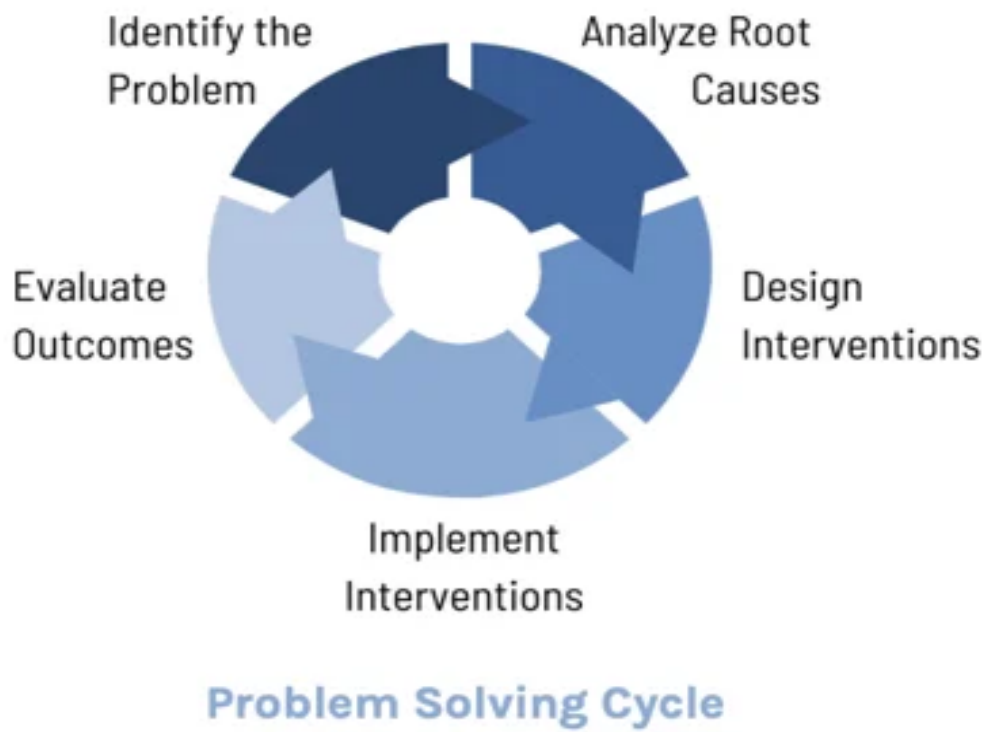


Figure 5. MTSS Problem Solving Cycle.

School and Community Factors

In addition to the MTSS framework, there are several other factors that contribute to this study. There are several factors and events that have taken place in the communities that schools serve. These factors and events have greatly affected the learning process for students within the schools. Schools have been required to adjust their practices and strategies to best meet the needs of their students.

One major factor that has affected schools is the Covid Pandemic. The covid pandemic brought about changes in several areas for schools. Online learning, discipline and attendance were greatly affected by the Covid Pandemic. Traumatic experiences are another community factor that is affecting students and how they progress in school. The effects of traumatic experiences can greatly hinder the learning process for students (Reidy et al., 2021).

The covid pandemic and traumatic experiences have led to increased discipline issues and learning gaps for students (Aurini & Davies, 2021). Learning gaps lead to more students that experience a lack of success in school. As a result, schools have been required to provide more support for students that are affected by these factors. Alternative learning programs have been utilized to support the increased number of students that have enrolled due to academic struggles that are related to these factors. The increased need for interventions and supports has resulted in the implementation of the MTSS framework within schools (Wakerle-Holloman et al., 2021). The intent of the MTSS framework implementation is to assist schools in providing supports and interventions that will lead to the success of students that are affected by these community factors.

Post Covid Effects on Student Behavior

The Covid pandemic brought about many changes in society. The pandemic temporarily shifted the approach to school and how instruction was delivered (Aska & Gazmararian, 2023). The Spring of 2020 brought about a shift that school districts are still affected by today. Most school districts across the country implemented some form of virtual learning at the onset of the Covid pandemic. This move eventually led to most students being out of school for an average of 15 months. It is believed that the period of virtual learning had a huge impact on students socially, emotionally and educationally (Aska & Gazmararian, 2023). As a result, many schools experienced many difficulties in student discipline, academic performance and overall approach to school (Aurini & Davies, 2021).

Many schools experienced an increase in student misbehaviors after the Covid pandemic (Aurini & Davies, 2021). Acts of violence in schools increased, as students struggled to manage conflict. These factors contributed to an increase in out of school suspensions. It is believed that the extended time out of school during the pandemic contributed to a shift in how students socialized (Samji et al., 2022). Prior to the Covid Pandemic, students traditionally interacted socially in many facets while in school. The process of handling conflict was seamless in that students could communicate face to face with their peers to resolve any conflicts. Students were able to have face to face access to adults in school that could help guide or mediate students that were in conflict with each other (Samji et al., 2022)

The period of virtual learning did not allow students to socialize in a traditional sense. Students were confined to communication with devices. As a result, students fell out of practice with the everyday social norms that naturally governed their day-to-day interactions with others (Samji et al., 2022). A return to school quickly exposed the absence of effective communication

and conflict resolution among students all over the country. Schools experienced a significant increase in violent school acts. According the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, there was an increase of over 1100 acts of crime and violence in North Carolina High Schools from the 2018-19 to the 2021-22 school year (NC DPI, 2023). The rate of crime and violence per 1,000 students increased from 10.73 to 13.16 across the same time span (NC DPI, 2023) The National Center for Educational Statistics reported that 46% of schools saw an increase in the number of fights after students returned to in person learning (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2022). The increase in school violence resulted in schools assigning more out of school suspensions as a consequence to these violent acts.

The overall effect of the increase in violent acts and increased suspensions, is that these two factors led to an increased number of students that were out of school for extended periods of time. Many schools saw an increase in the number of long-term suspensions as students engaged in repeat offenses of school violence (Samji et al., 2022).

Academic Gaps

It is believed that the long period of isolation and virtual learning had a negative effect on student learning (Aurini & Davies 2021). Virtual learning took on many forms as educators and families adjusted to life in isolation. Many school districts worked to provide students with the highest level of academic instruction during the pandemic (Aska & Gazmararian, 2023). Schools used several web-based learning platforms to provide students with resources that would support learning for students. It is believed that the academic gap widened with many students as a result of learning in isolation. Scores on standardized math scores across the country decreased by 10% while scores on standardized reading tests decreased by 9% (Dorn et al., 2021). Many students

returned to school after the Covid pandemic with significant learning regression in the core subjects (Dorn et al., 2021).

The routine of not having to attend a physical school building during the pandemic also had a negative impact on students. High absenteeism was a byproduct of a long period in virtual learning for students during the Covid pandemic (Ashta & Gazmararian 2023). Students struggled to find the motivation to attend school consistently. Families had grown accustomed to the routine of not having to physically attend school. One study found that the number of public-school students that were chronically absent from school has doubled since returning after the Covid pandemic (Walters, 2023).

The combination of widened learning gaps, learning loss and high absenteeism can be great contributors to students dropping out of school (Walters, 2023). All the negative factors of the pandemic that have affected students were no surprise to educators across the country. School districts were well aware of the potential effects on students and worked to lessen the impact that the Covid pandemic had on students. The anticipation of learning loss, and a need to reestablish school structure was evident as schools drafted return-to-school plans for students (Dorn et al 2021). Many educators across the country knew that the educational ripple effects of the pandemic would require years of work to fully recover. School districts anticipated the decrease in math and reading scores as well as an increase in the dropout rate of students (Dorn et al 2021).

All of these contributing factors from the Covid pandemic also had varying effects on families based on their socio-economic status (Sahlberg, 2021). Families that were of high-economic status were able to provide their children with access to digital resources to ensure that they maximized the learning opportunity during the virtual learning period. These families could

afford child care service and academic tutors to offset the potential of learning loss for their children during the pandemic. Families that were of low socio-economic status did not fare as well as their counterparts during the pandemic. The home environment for students of low-socio-economic status were not conducive to a stable learning environment (Sahlberg, 2021)

Virtual learning put many poor students in difficult situations in regard to learning. (Ashta & Gazmararian 2023). The access to digital resources was not equitable for marginalized populations of students. Access to technology and internet service caused major obstacles for poor students during the pandemic (James, 2021). Many students were expected to supervise younger siblings while their parents worked. Students in low socio-economic situations were forced into being responsible for more things while also being responsible for being a student. To compound the issue, many students in low socio-economic homes were forced to be students in unstable home environments (Ashta & Gazmararian, 2023). Being able to attend school for many marginalized students was their opportunity to escape abuse, neglect and other factors that negatively impacted their lives (Ashta & Gazmararian, 2023).

The Covid pandemic caused many poor students to be negatively impacted educationally, socially and emotionally (James, 2021). These marginalized students can be identified as those students that had increased suspensions, increased learning loss, and are most at risk of dropping out of school after the Covid pandemic (Sahlberg, 2021). The Covid pandemic had the greatest effect on students that were of low socio-economic status (James, 2021). Furthermore, these students can be considered to be even greater at-risk of not being successful in school.

The contributing factors to the negative impact on students forced school districts to develop alternative options for students to gain ground with their academic progress (Unicef, 2020). The effects of the Covid pandemic have exposed the high needs of many students as they

have returned to in person learning. One of the positive aspects of the pandemic is that it provided many school districts with the opportunity to think outside the traditional box with providing instruction for students (Unicef, 2020). School districts are now recognizing the need to expose students to alternative learning interventions that can potentially support them in being successful.

Adverse Childhood Experiences Scores (ACES)

The impact of traumatic childhood experiences can have a significant effect on how well students perform in school. The residual effects of a traumatic experience can lead to many students being considered at-risk of not succeeding in school (Reidy et al., 2021). Many students that attend public schools have experienced or are currently dealing with a traumatic experience. Trauma informed researchers have developed a scaled scoring system that measures the frequency and level of traumatic experiences that an individual may experience as a child (Na et al., 2023). A student's Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Score can inform educators about a child's environment outside of school. The ACE score can also give educators valuable information on why a student is misbehaving or not performing academically in school (Reidy et al., 2021). More importantly, the information gained from the ACE Score can be very beneficial in prescribing any alternative learning supports to combat any academic struggles that a student may have.

A traumatic experience is an incident that causes a person physical, emotional, spiritual, or psychological harm. (Vu et al., 2022) Trauma informed researchers have developed a scored rubric that coincides with a particular traumatic event. The list of childhood traumatic events that are listed on the ACEs survey are events that ask about physical, sexual or verbal abuse. The survey also asks about living with a family member with mental illness, addicted to

drugs/alcohol or has been incarcerated. The survey covers questions about parents separating, divorcing, and witnessing a parent being abused (Vu et al., 2022).

Trauma informed researchers and educators administer this survey to students to gauge the level of their ACE score. ACE scores range from 0-10, and each traumatic experience counts as one point (Smith Battle et al., 2022). Students are able to be discrete about any particular traumatic experiences by just providing their tallied survey scores. Once a score is identified, educators have the ability to cross reference a student's scores with their school performance. A comparison of the data will provide educators with the ability to hone in on why particular students may be struggling in the school environment (Reidy et al., 2021).

The more ACEs you have, the greater the risk for chronic disease, mental illness, violence and being a victim of violence (Smith Battle et al., 2022). A score range of 1-3 is considered to be an intermediate risk, while a score of 4 or higher considers a person to be at a high risk of these potential outcomes (Smith Battle et al., 2022). There is a direct correlation between students with high ACEs scores and their misbehavior or poor academic performance in school (Reidy et al., 2021). As a result, these students are often considered to be at-risk of not being successful in school. Students that fall into this category are often considered to be students that require alternative learning interventions to ensure school success (Noah, 2023).

Lack of Academic Success

Students that are considered at-risk of not being successful in school often experience long periods of poor academic results. The number of students that are not performing on grade level academically in public school has significantly increased (Vu et al., 2022). There are several factors that can lead to students not performing well academically in school. Common home life issues can greatly affect school performance. Financial instability, abuse and neglect

are all traumatic factors that students can be exposed to within their homes (Sosu et al., 2021). The traumatic repercussions from these factors causes students to struggle with maintaining consistent focus on academics.

A vast majority of students are not academically prepared to enter kindergarten. Rivers' study attributed that students who come from low-income homes are not exposed to learning as consistently as their counterparts (Rivers, 2022). As a result, these students start school already behind academically. This then leads to a continued cycle of widened academic gaps as students' progress through school.

A student's academic performance in school is largely measured by their performance on standardized tests. Students who have a history of poor performance often do not perform well on standardized reading and math tests (Dorn et al., 2021). The cycle of poor academic performance in the classroom and on standardized tests follow the student as they progress through school. Studies show that the confidence level of students is greatly affected by years of continued poor academic performance (Casazza, 2021). Students begin to notice their own struggles in comparison to their peers. As a result, school avoidance and other behaviors manifest with students to mask the issue of their academic struggles. The issue of academic struggles, compounded with the period of virtual learning during the Covid Pandemic, has caused the academic gap to widen with many students. Standardized test scores declined significantly after the pandemic, while historically underserved students fell further behind (Dorn et al., 2021).

There is a direct correlation between repeated student discipline offenses and low academic performance (Malika et al., 2021). High absenteeism can be a common problem with students that have historically not performed well academically in school. Students that

experience long periods of low academic performance often exhibit behaviors to avoid school or school related activities (Casazza, 2021). Excessive absences and truancy can lead to students getting further behind in school. High absenteeism is one of the leading causes of students dropping out of school. The lack of school success and high absenteeism can cause students to be considered at-risk of dropping out of school (Malika et al., 2021).

Increased Need for Interventions and Supports

Students attending public schools represent a group that is more diverse than ever. Students are diverse in their needs for support and interventions that will allow them to be successful in school (Moreno, 2021). There has been an increase in data that focuses on out of school suspensions, academic performance and student childhood adverse experiences (Reidy et al., 2021). The increases in the number of students effected by these points of data show that there is an increased need for learning interventions.

There has been a significant increase in the number of long-term suspensions in public schools (Casazza, 2021). Long term suspensions typically coincide with students being referred to alternative schools. Long term suspensions are normally the result of students being suspended for repeated discipline violations (Giordano, 2021). Studies show that suspensions have increased by 16% nationwide since 2018 (Welsh & Little, 2018). Research shows that more students are performing poorly in their academics than in previous years (Matheny, 2023).

Studies show that there has been an increase in the number of students that have been identified with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or a Section 504 Plan (Alhusayni 2022). IEP plans are typically established for students when they show a significant struggle with learning key lesson concepts. Section 504 plans are established for students that have a physical condition that may hinder learning (Butler & De La Paz, 2021). There has been an increase in the number

of students with IEPs or Section 504s that have been referred to alternative schools or programs (Gradsley et al., 2019). The number of students that have been diagnosed with mental illness has also increased (Otradovec, 2021).

There has also been an increase in the number of alternative school referrals. The increase in alternative learning referrals is the result of increased long-term suspensions, IEPs/504s and an increase in mental illness among students (Welsh, 2019). Students that struggle with behavior, learning, and mental illness need to have access to alternatives that will support them in being successful in school (Gradsley et al., 2019). Alternative schools can provide students with many opportunities to be successful. Alternative schools can customize their programs to address specific academic requirements while incorporating vocational training, and life skills development (Rojewski, 2022).

Alternative Programming for At-Risk Students

Alternative schools utilize a variety of strategies to support at-risk students in being successful (Yusro et al., 2023). Students that are referred to alternative schools require a variety of strategies to accommodate them with academic support. Oftentimes students that are referred to alternative schools are behind academically (Anderson, 2019). The instructional progression that students typically make is hindered by repeated discipline offenses that lead to out of school suspensions. At-risk students also tend to have high absenteeism, which causes them to miss valuable instruction (Anderson, 2019). As a result, these students fall behind in learning key concepts. Alternative schools must also accommodate students that have Individual Education Plans and Section 504 plans with the supports that are specified for each student's plan (Gradsley et al., 2019).

There is a growing trend in alternative schools that allow students to graduate with alternative diploma options (Williams, 2019). School districts across the country allow schools to apply for graduation waivers for students based on age and certain hardships (Johnson et al., 2019). North Carolina currently requires students to earn 22 credits to graduate, while local school districts may require more credits to graduate (NC DPI, 2023). School districts can apply to waive local graduation requirements for students that may age out or have hardships that hinder them from completing graduation requirements. These waivers are gradually becoming the norm for students all over the country (Kannam & Wiess, 2019). At-risk students are often identified as students that have endured hardships that have hindered their progress in school (Lu et al., 2021). Alternate diploma options have proven to be effective in getting more at-risk students to graduate from high school (Williams, 2019).

Many alternative schools offer credit recovery options for students that have previously failed courses at their base schools (Hart et al., 2019). Credit recovery interventions allow students to earn missed credits and move closer to graduating. Students are allowed to enroll in credit recovery courses through various online learning systems (Lewewellen, 2019). The credit recovery course is a condensed version of the original course that allow students to learn the main standards and objectives of a course. Credit recovery practices give students hope in knowing that they have an option to go back and earn credit for courses that they have previously failed. Many schools used the credit recovery option to motivate students to keep working towards graduation. Credit recovery options also effectively accommodate and support students that struggle academically (Hart et al., 2019).

Online learning systems are often used by alternative schools to provide instruction for their students. These programs allow students to complete coursework at their own pace. One

example of an online learning system that is used is Edgenuity (Lewewellen, 2019). Edgenuity allows alternative school staff to assign courses to students. These courses are aligned with the state courses have the same standards as the courses that are offered at the student's base school. The online learning model also gives students the opportunity to work in a face-to-face setting or virtually from home (Lewewellen, 2019). The online learning model gives students the flexibility to complete course work in a manner that fits each student's situation. Students that struggle with high anxiety may work better at home, and the online learning model allows the schools to accommodate these students. Online learning models have been effective in accommodating students with various needs (Asim et al., 2020).

Career and Technical Education is a large component of middle and high school instructional programs (Rojewski, 2022). Many school districts recognize the need to provide students with the opportunity to explore careers as way to cater to student interest. A differentiated approach to exposing students to various post-secondary plans has proven to be beneficial to students (Rojewski, 2022). Studies show that students will either enter into a four-year college, choose a CTE pathway or go directly into the work force (Ansel et al., 2022). There are also those students that choose to go in the military after graduating from high school.

Many high school students are opting to go into a career in the trades section of CTE (Ansel et al., 2022). Trades jobs are those that require a particular skill set, knowledge, or ability (Brunner et al., 2023). Trades jobs are considered hands on jobs, that span across many career clusters. High schools across the country provide trades programs for students to enroll into. High Schools offer programs like auto technology, welding and general construction (Ansel et al., 2022). School districts are also working to expand their trades offering to meet the need of growing student interest (Rojewski, 2022).

Students that are at-risk, can greatly benefit from being exposed to alternate career pathways through CTE (Brunner et al., 2023). CTE can be a great resource to expose students that attend alternative schools to post-secondary pathways and careers. Exposing at-risk students to post-secondary pathways is a great way to offset the dropout rate (Fletcher, 2006). Research shows that “81% of students who drop out say relevant, real-world learning opportunities would have kept them in school” (Bland, 2023 pp 1). Providing at-risk students with the opportunity to immerse themselves into something that interest them could lead them into a life-long career.

Schools are presently working to incorporate credentialing programs within their CTE programs. Credentialing is a process by which high school students earn individual certificates in a specific skill or trade (Walsh, 2019.) The intent of credentialing is to provide the students with the opportunity to gain real world work experience and be better prepared for the work force after high school. For example, students can earn certificates in Excel, Adobe Computer Design, and Serve Safe food preparation (Walsh, 2019). These certifications allow students to show employers that they are certified in a job-related skill.

At-risk students could greatly benefit from being exposed to credentialing opportunities (Walsh, 2019). There are several examples of programs in North Carolina that offer at-risk students the opportunity to earn credentialing certificates in CTE. The Career and Technical Education Center located in Burlington NC, offers a wide variety of CTE programs to the students in the Alamance County School District. Students from the alternative school in Alamance County are also served at the Career and Technical Center. Students are able to earn certificates in wide range of CTE concentrations like Auto Technology, Engineering and Health Sciences (Career and Technical Center, 2023).

Summary

Ensuring the success of at-risk students require schools to expose at risk students to interventions and supports that best meet their needs and interests. Schools must first be familiar with the variables that cause students to be identified as at risk. Excessive out of school suspensions, lack of academic success and unstable home environments are a few factors that cause students to be considered at risk (Lee & Jae, 2019). Traumatic experiences, mental illness, and academic struggles can also lead to students being at risk of not being successful in school (Reidy et al., 2021). The increased prevalence of these at-risk factors has led to an increased need for learning interventions.

There is a greater need to provide interventions and supports for students that are enrolled in an alternative learning program. Students that are enrolled in an alternative learning program may display at risk factors that hinder their growth in school (Sahlberg, 2021). The MTSS framework interventions and supports have been utilized to assist at-risk students in obtaining school success. This chapter outlines the factors that lead to students being considered at risk. This chapter also identifies the MTSS interventions to support at risk students enrolled in alternative learning programs. At risk students are often exposed to career and technical education, online learning and social emotional supports to combat any hinderance in progression in school (Lee & Jae, 2019). This study aims to analyze the experiences of staff, students and parents on the impact of MTSS interventions on at-risk students in an alternative program.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY

The Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning Program (MNAS-ALP) is often tasked with providing a sound instructional environment for students that are considered at-risk. Students that are referred to MNAS-ALP struggle with being successful within the traditional school environment. Repeated disciplinary issues have led to excessive absences that cause students to fall behind academically. As a result, many of the students that are referred to MNAS-ALP are behind academically. The academic regression that students experience increases the chances of these students not being successful in school. Furthermore, other barriers exist that hinder student learning like socio-economic status, mental illness and traumatic experiences (Pemberton and Edeburn, 2021). These factors are often addressed with school-based therapy and support from the school social worker (Doung et al., 2020). School administrators and school counselors are also used as resources to provide students with support in these areas (Dowden et al., 2021).

To address ongoing academic inequities among students, North Carolina implemented the MTSS framework. One common practice of traditional schools that is used to support student learning and misbehavior is the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework. The MTSS framework is designed to expose students to various interventions that will support an improvement in academic performance or behavior. The aim of this study was to analyze the experiences of staff members that provide MTSS framework interventions to students that are enrolled in the alternative learning program. Furthermore, this study captured student perceptions and experiences in receiving MTSS supports and interventions. This study also obtained the thoughts and opinions of the parents of students who have received MTSS interventions in our alternative learning program.

Research Guiding Questions

This study is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of staff members that are providing MTSS interventions to students enrolled in our ALP?
2. What are the perceptions and experiences of ALP students, and the parents of ALP, students that are being supported with MTSS interventions?
3. How does implementation of the MTSS framework Influence leadership skill develop of the scholarly practitioner?

Study Design and Rationale

The basis of this this study was driven by the problem of an increased number of students that were at risk of not succeeding in traditional school settings. The vast majority of the students that enroll in our alternative program struggle in school due to chronic misbehavior, mental health and traumatic experiences. These at-risk factors often lead to high absenteeism and poor academic performance (Gottfried & Ansari, 2022). This study utilized the MTSS framework with an explanatory sequential mixed methods design. Explanatory sequential is a research design that uses two phases to analyze qualitative and quantitative data in sequential order (Mertler, 2022). As the scholarly practitioner, this study design allowed me to collaborate with inquiry partners to implement the MTSS framework within our alternative learning program. The aim of this study was to analyze the experiences of staff members as they expose students to MTSS interventions. This study design also allowed me to collect the perceptions and experiences of students that will be exposed to the MTSS interventions while enrolled in our program. I collected data on staff and student perceptions of MTSS tier interventions to analyze the framework's effectiveness in closing instructional gaps for our students. I also collected data

on the perceptions of parents to analyze the effectiveness of MTSS interventions used to support students enrolled in our ALP.

This study applied the process implementing the MTSS framework within the Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning Program (MNAS-ALP)) with fidelity. The Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework, is a framework that is designed to provide academic and behavioral supports to at risk students (Wakerle-Holloman et al., 2021). The MTSS framework was implemented into routine practice in our alternative learning program. The focus of the implementation was to support at-risk students by working with inquiry partners to implement the MTSS framework to support at-risk students in being successful within our alternative learning program.

A mixed method design was used for this study to gain an understanding of how the MTSS framework will impact at-risk students. This research design analyzed the perceptions and experiences that the study participants had on the implementation of the MTSS framework. The mixed methods approach called for the collection of qualitative and quantitative data in a particular study (Mertler, 2022). I gathered quantitative data by reviewing and documenting student demographic data. Data collected in the study also included the reasons as to why these students have been referred to our ALP. Students were also provided with a questionnaire on their perceptions about their own learning needs. I also gathered qualitative data by creating focus groups to document the perceptions and experiences of staff and students on the impact of the MTSS process. I also collected qualitative data by conducting one-on-one interviews with the parents of students enrolled in our ALP. The mixed method design of this study allowed me, along with the inquiry partners, to develop a system of layered support through the implementation of the MTSS framework. Furthermore, this study collected data that measures

the opinions of staff members, students and parents that are connected to our alternative learning program.

This study was organized into three phases using the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) model (see Table 2). The PDSA model allowed the me to outline the various phases of the study in order to effectively plan, implement and collect sound data (England, 2022). Phase 1 of my PDSA cycle involved analyzing baseline data on the number of alternative program referrals, suspensions, and school dropout data. Phase 1 also included conducting a pilot study to ensure accuracy of instrumentation. Phase 2 of the PDSA cycle began with the monitoring of each Tier and the interventions that were utilized in each Tier for the MTSS framework. Phase 2 of the PDSA Model within this study allowed the me to work with inquiry partners to analyze the effectiveness of interventions on student achievement in regard to student progress while enrolled at our ALP. Phase 3 of the PDSA model for this study allowed me to focus on data collection for all phases of the study. Data was collected on how well students respond to interventions. This data was collected from the findings of equity partners through the problem-solving team. All data was collected to gauge the perceptions and experiences of study participants on the impact of the MTSS framework on students that are enrolled in our alternative learning program.

Context of Study

This study focused on implementing an MTSS framework in an alternative learning program. The staff at the MNAS-ALP worked to identify the academic needs of students that are considered the be at risk and were enrolled in our alternative learning program. The staff then provided tiered interventions and supports for students based on their individual struggles. Students are referred to our ALP for reasons that are considered to be at-risk factors.

Table 2

Phases of Inquiry and Respective Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycles

Phase One	Plan	Plan the process of implementing MTSS in our alternative program
	Do	Implement MTSS training for staff. Develop the Problem-Solving Team.
	Study	Measure the level of understanding of the MTSS/PBIS by staff/equity partners. Administer MTSS Belief Survey.
	Act	Develop Layered Support for instruction through MTSS framework.
Phase Two	Plan	Develop an implementation plan for MTSS in the alternative program.
	Do	Carry out the implementation plan for MTSS and monitor all the process for Tiered support and interventions by staff and inquiry partners. Provide students with questionnaire on student perceptions about their learning needs. Provide teachers with Professional Development on progress monitoring and weekly meeting with students.
	Study	Analyze data from student questionnaire and teacher reflections on weekly progress meetings with students. Conduct observations of PLT meetings, Problem Solving Team (Tier) meetings and PBIS Committee meetings.
	Act	Make necessary adjustments to any layered supports and processes
Phase Three	Plan	Develop plan to collect data on staff and student perceptions of MTSS supports through focus groups.
	Do	Collect data from PLTs, Tier meetings on student academic progress. Collect data from staff, students and parents on the impact of MTSS framework through focus groups.
	Study	Analyze the data to measure the impact of the MTSS framework.
	Act	Share findings with stakeholders to gauge the impact on at-risk students and how it relates to their success in the alternative program.

Students are referred for repeated discipline offenses, or for major offenses to the student code of conduct. These repeated discipline offenses lead to these students receiving excessive out of school suspensions. Out of school suspensions equate to excessive absences, which causes students to miss valuable instructional time in school.

Students are provided with an alternative setting to give them an opportunity to learn in a smaller setting that can focus on their individual needs. Students that are enrolled in our ALP have a variety of needs that require support. The academic needs of students are the core of what our staff worked to address. However, students enrolled in our ALP have other struggles that hinder their learning. Many of the students enrolled in our ALP have mental health struggles. These struggles require staff to work closely with parents, school support staff and clinical professionals to effectively support students.

Students that are enrolled in our ALP have also experienced traumatic experiences. These traumatic experiences can lead to students struggling with anxiety, social interactions and conflict resolution. These struggles also hinder students from properly engaging in sound instructional practices. Students are also referred to our ALP as a result of them being released from locked facilities. These students are provided with an alternative setting to help them make a smooth transition back to their traditional school.

Most of the students that are enrolled in our ALP come to us behind academically. Some of these students naturally struggle with learning, while others struggle as a result of the at-risk factors that they have been exposed to. The aim of this study was to support students academically by exposing them to MTSS framework interventions. Support staff were utilized to support students with other areas that hinder learning. The focus was to ensure that we support

students with learning while also supporting them with those factors that potentially hinder their learning.

Inquiry Partners

Inquiry partners were essential in supporting the me in conducting this study. Inquiry partners assisted with data collection, development of instrumentation, providing interventions, and data analysis. I was able to collaborate with the following inquiry partners to effectively provide students with MTSS interventions and supports. The experience and leadership that inquiry partners possess was essential to ensuring that this study's implementation and data collection were sound and accurate.

Working with the inquiry partners allowed me to schedule meetings to discuss the study and how the study will be conducted. Meeting with the inquiry partners allowed the me to receive feedback on best practices for implementing an MTSS framework within our ALP. Inquiry partners provided valuable feedback and ideas on how best to expose students to the MTSS interventions and supports. My collaboration with these inquiry partners ensured that this study was conducted in the most efficient manner. This also ensured that we collected the most impactful data that supports student success.

1. Student Services Director

Oversees the operations for all support that is related to serving students. The Student Services Director supervises school counselors, school psychologist and school social workers. The administrators of the alternative learning program report to the Student Services Director for support and guidance on best practice strategies for alternative education programming. I feel that this position was very important to my study in

that the Student Services Director will be able to support with data and insight on how best to conduct the study.

2. Administrator for MNAS-ALP

Oversees the MNAS-ALP to ensure that the staff are following the established processes and procedures of the ALP. The Administrator of our ALP works closely with staff, parents and students to ensure that students are enrolled in an efficient manner. The administrator also works to ensure that students are progressing while enrolled in our ALP. The administrator was very important to this study in that he worked with the coordinator to implement and monitor the MTSS framework in our ALP.

3. High School Teachers for MNAS-ALP

Facilitate Learning for high school students that are enrolled on our ALP. Provides support to students that may be struggle with coursework provided by Edgenuity. High school teachers also work with each other, school counselors and the administration team to monitor student progress. The high school teachers will be very important to this study, because they work with our students daily with providing instruction and instructional interventions.

4. Instructional Coach for MNAS-ALP

Facilitates the instructional programming for MDAS-ALP. The Instructional Coach works with staff to provide instructional support for students. This position also facilitates the professional learning communities for teachers. The instructional coach also works with the Coordinator and the ALP Administrator to provide training to the

ALP staff. The instructional Coach will be a valuable partner in this study due to their role in supporting instruction and providing training.

5. School Counselors for MNAS-ALP

Provide academic and behavioral support for students enrolled in the MNAS-ALP.

Work with staff support staff to address student struggles with attendance, coursework, behavior and mental health. The school counselors will be vital to this study as they are vital to the process of supporting students in academics and behavior. They also work very closely with all ALP staff to support students in various areas.

6. School Nurse

Manages and oversees all student care plans for students that are enrolled in our ALP.

The school Nurse works with the staff, parents and admin team to support students with health needs to ensure that these needs do not hinder their learning. The Nurse was a great resource in this study in that she will be able to provide support for students who are struggling academically due to current health issues.

7. School Social Worker

Works with staff, students and parents to provide support for students that may have basic needs that are unmet that hinder their learning in school. The School Social Worker provides the ALP Administrators with valuable information that may be hindering students from being at their best in school. The School Social Worker will be very important to this study in that she was able to provide the staff with information and resources that enabled students to better focus on their academic progress.

Ethical Considerations

I have completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative. The CITI program provides in-depth training courses on behavioral and social research regulations. These training courses focus on ethical regulations and practices in regard to working with human subjects when conducting research. The CITI training courses also provide researchers with valuable information on confidentiality, conflicts of interest and the rights of any human subjects in regard to research. Additionally, I followed my school district's policy in maintaining the data that I collect from this study for five years. The data collected was password protected and stored on my districts network and on my laptop computer. I will then properly discard these items after the five years.

I submitted the proper approval application to ECU's UMCIRB (see Appendix A). The purpose of IRB was to ensure that the study was ethical, transparent and beneficial to all subjects involved in the study. All participants were provided with a consent form that they completed to be a part of my study. Staff members were provided with a consent to participate form to participate in my study (see Appendix B) I also provided students subjects with an assent form that gave permission for me to work with them for my study (see Appendix C). I also provided parents with a consent to participate for each student that participated in my study (see Appendix D). All information and data that was gathered remained confidential. Subject names and survey responses were protected by the use of pseudonyms.

Approval to conduct the study was given by my school district. This approval allowed me to gain access to participants and provide me with the opportunity to meet with key leaders in my school district. I was able to initially present my study proposal to the assistant superintendent. I then followed my school district's board policy to receive approval to conduct my study, and

gain access to all participants (See Appendix E). After receiving the official approval, I began to meet with key stakeholders to inform them about my study. I was able to meet with the Student Services Director for my school district. This meeting was very beneficial in that the Alternative Learning Program falls under the Student Services Department in my school district. The Student Services Director was able to provide great insight on the past and current processes of our district's alternative learning program. I was then able to meet with the administrator and staff for my district's alternative learning program. This meeting was very productive in that I was able to get buy-in and agreements to participate in my study. The alternative learning program staff was also able to provide background on current interventions being utilized in the alternative learning program. The experience and knowledge of the administrator and staff was a great benefit to me in conducting my study.

The most critical part of my study was gaining access to staff, students and parents to examine their perceptions and experiences on the MTSS interventions. Staff, students and parents were assured that their responses would remain confidential, and that their participation was voluntary. Participants had the ability to end their participation at any time during the study.

School districts are tasked with serving students that are considered at risk of not being successful in school. Each district employs their own strategies to best serve at-risk students through various alternative education models and programming. The MTSS framework has been adopted by the state of North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction, with the intent to support students that are struggling with learning and behavior. This support comes in the form of interventions that are used in response to student struggles with learning and behavior. Exposing at-risk students in alternative education programs to MTSS framework interventions could prove to be an effective practice in effectively supporting them. Individual schools and

programs must implement the MTSS framework with fidelity to ensure that students have the best opportunity to be successful. The ripple effects of this study could lead to a more uniform approach by Alternative Learning Programs across the state.

Study Procedures

The MTSS framework has been implemented by the state of North Carolina, with the expectation that all districts implement the tiered interventions to support student learning and academic growth. Many students that are referred to our district's alternative learning program, are behind academically. The aim of this study was to analyze the experiences of staff members providing MTSS interventions to at-risk students that are enrolled in our alternative learning program. (ALP) This study also worked to obtain student and parent perceptions on the MTSS interventions and supports used to support student academic growth.

The planning for completing this study started in the Summer of 2024. The Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycle was utilized by the me to organize the process for implementing this study (see Table 2) Phase I of this study focused on the need for sound alternative learning interventions for at-risk students that are enrolled in a high school alternative learning program. The MTSS framework is designed to support students that are considered to be at-risk of not succeeding academically in school (Sailor et al., 2021). The data collected from my district shows that the greatest concentration of high school at-risk students are those students that are enrolled in our districts alternative learning program.

The majority of the high school students that are enrolled in our alternative learning program are referred for several reasons that can be categorized as at-risk factors. Students are referred to our program for repeated discipline offenses or may have committed a major disciplinary offense. Students are also referred to us that have pending felony charges. Students

that are exiting locked facilities such as detention centers, therapeutic group homes or mental institutions are also referred to the program before transitioning back to their base schools. The ALP program provides additional dropout prevention support for at risk students. The students referred to our ALP are enrolled so that they can recover failed credit while working in a smaller setting with minimal distractions.

Many of the high school students that are referred to our alternative learning program have one at-risk factor in common, in that they are all behind academically. Students are required to earn 22 credits to fulfill the requirements to graduate from high school. Many of the students that are referred to our alternative learning program have fallen out of their respective cohort graduation classes. Repeated discipline issues lead to excessive out of school suspensions for these students. Out of school suspensions in turn lead to huge losses of instructional time, which can lead to significant learning gaps.

Phase I of this study sought to hone in on the academic needs of the students enrolled in our alternative learning program. Phase I began by allowing the high school staff members to be trained in the aspects of the MTSS framework. I worked with staff members to provide in-house and district training on the MTSS framework. The initial intent of Phase I was to provide the high school teachers and support staff with the opportunity to become well versed in the processes and procedures of the MTSS framework. Staff members also participated in developing and implementing best practice strategies that provided students with sound academic support. Phase I of the study worked to establish a plan to implement a sound MTSS framework to support students with academic interventions and supports.

Phase II of this study allowed the staff to implement an organized MTSS framework that provides academic support for students that are enrolled in MDNS-ALP. Support staff also

participated in the creation of our program's problem-solving team. (PST) Students were exposed to interventions in one of the three tiers of support that are embedded within the MTSS framework. Phase II of this study provided an overall blueprint of the process by which students will progress through each tier of interventions based on need and their response to instruction in each respective tier.

Phase III of this study initiated the process of analyzing the experiences of ALP staff members that provided MTSS framework interventions for students that were enrolled in MDNS-ALP. The impact of the MTSS framework was measured by teacher perceptions and experiences on the impact of MTSS framework interventions. Student perception interviews were conducted to obtain data on how students feel about how they learn and how best they can be supported academically. There was also a focus group conducted with students to collect data on how students feel about impact of the MTSS interventions on their academic performance. Individual interviews were conducted with parents to obtain their thoughts and opinions on the MTSS interventions used to support student in our ALP.

Instrumentation

Phase 1

To answer the questions guiding this study, I used the MTSS Framework with an explanatory sequential mixed methods design. To establish context around the problems that at-risk students face in school, student interviews were conducted to collect baseline data on student perceptions on their learning needs. For example, many of the students' reason for being assigned to the MNAS-ALP is for repeated discipline offenses. The interviews were conducted to collect data on student perceptions about their learning needs, and why they were referred to the MNAS-ALP (see Appendix F). The findings may also demonstrate a relationship between

the students' own perceptions of their learning needs and the perceptions of staff about student learning needs. Furthermore, the data collected from the student interviews allowed me to show a relationship between student instructional needs and the interventions that need to be utilized within the MTSS framework to support student progress.

I utilized focus group sessions to collect qualitative data from staff members to obtain their opinion on the effectiveness of the various instructional interventions that were used through the MTSS framework. I also developed open ended follow-up questions for the semi-structured focus group session for staff members (Mertler, 2022) (see Appendix G). The staff focus group data was utilized to address the first inquiry question that seeks to measure the experiences of staff that are providing MTSS Framework interventions for at-risk students that are enrolled in an alternative learning program. Assessing staff member perceptions and experiences on the impact of an MTSS Framework's interventions provided meaningful feedback for the purpose of this study. A pilot focus group session aided me in refining the focus groups questions. The middle school staff that participated in the pilot study provided great feedback on how to structure the questions to ensure that staff and students are able to provide detailed responses.

In addition to quantitative data, I used focus groups to collect qualitative data (Mertler, 2022). Open ended questions were used to collect qualitative data from students that participated in the study. I developed the focus group questions to collect student perceptions and experiences about the MTSS interventions (see Appendix H). The student questionnaire asked about student perceptions on their learning needs and the reason they feel they were assigned to the Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning Program. The student questionnaire allowed me

to cross reference this data with student focus group responses to ensure consistency in regard to perceived student learning needs and the needed interventions.

I conducted student focus groups to collect qualitative data on the study (Mertler, 2022). Focus groups were conducted on campus at the MNAS-ALP. The questions that were developed for the focus group sessions are open ended questions that allowed the students to elaborate on their feelings about the interventions they received through an MTSS Framework. The data collected from the focus group allowed me to address inquiry question 2, by examining the impact of the MTSS interventions through the perceptions of students.

I also conducted one on one interviews with parents to collect qualitative data on the study. I developed open ended questions for the parent interviews. The one-on-one interviews with parents allowed me to obtain qualitative data consisting of parent feelings about the MTSS interventions that students received. In order to access student data, I received permission from the Eastern County School district through the district's board policy on conducting research. I provided parents with a consent to participate form asking for them to agree to participate as well as agreeing to having their children participate in my study. There was also an assent letter provided to students asking them to agree to participation in the study. The surveys and interviews were be conducted once the permissions and agreements were received by me.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with the intent of gathering data from the staff members that serve in our alternative learning program. The aim of the pilot study was to also refine the focus group questions to maximize the quality of data obtained from providing students with MTSS interventions and supports. The participants that were used for the pilot study were the middle school teachers that serve in our alternative learning program. I elected to use the middle school

teachers, because my study will focus on high school teachers and students. I felt that I could obtain good feedback from the teacher's point of view by using the middle school staff.

We have three certified middle school teachers that serve in our alternative learning program. Each teacher is certified in different content areas, and bring a wealth of knowledge to serving students in our program. One teacher is certified in Math, while the another is certified in science. The third teacher is certified in English Language Arts. I felt that the diversity of this group of teachers would provide valuable feedback on the interview questions and the effectiveness of MTSS interventions. I recognized that the small size of the group presented certain risks with gathering data. Traditional middle schools typically serve more students and utilize a greater number of teachers. However, the number and makeup of middle school teachers served as excellent pilot participants as the program mirrors the size of our high school alternative learning program.

There were two different instruments that I used to conduct my pilot study. The first instrument that was used was the MTSS Belief Survey. This survey was provided to teachers to complete prior to conducting the focus group. Each academic year the MTSS Belief Survey is provided to all staff members in every school in our district to gauge the overall feeling of staff members on how well students can learn. The MTSS Belief Survey is used as a pre-survey to measure staff feelings on the students who may struggle with learning (Jennings, 2021). The MTSS Belief Survey measures how receptive staff are to providing interventions and supports for all students. The MTSS Belief Survey was provided to the three middle school teachers to obtain their perceptions and experiences about the instrument's questions on student learning, and their response to MTSS interventions and supports. The survey was shared with the middle

school teachers as a google form survey. The teachers were given a full day to complete the survey before we met to conduct the focus group.

The second form of instrumentation that was used was a focus group interview. I met with the middle school teachers to conduct the interviews face to face, while also using Webex for one teacher that was not available to meet in person. I used the Webex meeting tool to record and transcribe the focus group questions and responses from the teachers. I was able to read each question, and allow each teacher to answer freely. We reviewed each question, and I allowed the teachers to expound on each question response.

Data analysis included measuring the frequency of middle school teacher response to the MTSS belief survey administered using google docs. The responses to the survey were anonymous. The frequencies were converted to percentages and placed into a table to review with collaborative inquiry partners. Furthermore, I recorded the focus group using Webex transcription. The Webex program allowed me to utilize the transcripts to code the responses into categories based on teacher responses. The first finding that I developed from the data was that teachers believed that all students could learn. I coded this theme as “Teacher Buy-In”. In order for MTSS interventions to be effective, teachers have to buy into the belief that all students can learn. The other finding that was developed from the focus group data was the “effectiveness of interventions”. The focus group allowed me to capture the perceptions and experiences and opinions of teachers on how effective MTSS interventions may be on student learning. The middle school teachers provided examples on past and current experiences with providing interventions and support to students. These narratives demonstrate a relationship with the “effectiveness of interventions”. These themes align with the first inquiry question, by measuring

the perceptions and experiences of staff members that provide MTSS interventions to students enrolled in our alternative learning program.

An additional finding that arose from the focus group, was “ideas for more effective interventions and supports.” The focus group allowed the staff to provide their thoughts on how best to provide students with interventions and support. This finding also aligns with the first inquiry question in that it measures the input of staff members that are providing interventions and supports in our alternative learning program. Lastly, the middle school staff members were provided the opportunity to critique the MTSS belief survey questions and the focus group questions. Through their feedback, I was able to notate several suggested improvements for the MTSS belief survey and focus group questions. Working with my collaborative inquiry partners, we will review the suggested changes from the pilot study and make edits to the instruments for the full implementation of this inquiry.

Plan

Phase I of this study laid the foundation by analyzing baseline data on students enrolled in our ALP. In collaboration with my inquiry partners, we reviewed the number of past student referrals and the reason for those referrals. We also analyzed the academic progress of students that have enrolled in our program. A review of these data points will show that there were 291 total referrals to the MNAS-ALP in the 2023/2024 school year. High school students represented 157 referrals to our alternative learning program, 103 were Middle School referrals and 31 were Elementary School referrals. These findings demonstrate the ongoing challenges that persist with at risk students. Therefore, this study focused on integrating MTSS framework support and interventions for the high school students that are enrolled in the alternative learning program. Many of the high school students that are referred to our ALP are academically behind in graduation credits.

Do

I began by meeting with the administration team of our ALP to determine how best to integrate the MTSS framework. The meeting with the administration team allowed us to research how to incorporate the MTSS framework within our current ALP system of learning and support. The first step in our quest to implement MTSS in our ALP was to get the staff trained in the principles of MTSS. The initial MTSS training was provided online through our MTSS district support person. The staff engaged in the virtual training during the Summer of 2024 in preparation for full implementation for the Fall of 2024.

The next step of phase I was to establish a problem-solving team that worked to assess student progress and prescribe support for specific student needs. The problem-solving team consisted of the ALP Coordinator, the ALP Administrator, and the instructional support staff. The instructional support staff consisted of school counselors and the instructional coach. The problem-solving team met periodically throughout the summer to plan and develop follow up training presentations on MTSS for the staff. The problem-solving team also met throughout the summer to develop a plan of layered support that mirrors the MTSS model for tiered Support. The MTSS plan of tiered support was presented as a plan of expectations for staff to follow when providing students with academic support.

The follow-up trainings coincided with the staff workdays leading up to the first day of school. The administration team provided ALP staff with the details of the MTSS framework that was followed to maximize the instructional support that is provided to students. The plan of action for phase I consisted of developing an MTSS framework that provided staff with a sound plan of supports and interventions for the students that are enrolled in our ALP.

Study

The ALP administration team worked with staff to gauge the level of understanding on the MTSS framework. The MTSS Belief Survey was administered to staff to collect their thoughts on how well students respond to interventions. The Belief Survey is a pre-existing survey that was developed as resource for MTSS implementation within schools (see Appendix I). The survey gauges staff opinions on various students' ability to learn and retain academic content (Castillo et al., 2022). The Belief Survey allowed the ALP administration to gain staff buy-in on how best to provide interventions and supports for students.

Act

The ALP administration team analyzed the data from the Belief Survey and staff input to develop a plan of layered support through the MTSS framework. Protocols and procedures for implementing and providing support through MTSS framework were documented and provided to staff members. The administration team worked to make adjustments to the framework supports and processes.

Phase II

Plan

Phase II of this study began with the implementation of an MTSS framework that allowed staff to provide students with instructional tiered support within our ALP. The MTSS framework is designed to group students into three different tiers to determine the level of support that students may need. Tier 1 is the base level of support that all students receive when learning a concept for the first time (Sailor et al., 2021). The high school students that are enrolled in our ALP will receive their instruction through a web-based system called Edgenuity. Edgenuity will be the main source of instructional delivery for our students. Students work

through courses in Edgenuity in a self-paced manner. Students receive credit when they complete 100% of the required units with a grade of 60 or above. This mode of instruction through Edgenuity courses represented the Tier 1 level of support for students enrolled in our ALP.

There were two to three staff members that served in each classroom at the MNAS-ALP. There was at least one certified teacher and one teacher assistant in each classroom. The teachers and the support staff are expected to monitor students as they work to complete courses. Teachers and support staff also worked to provide instructional support for students that may struggle with course concepts. Tier 2 interventions are the second level of support interventions within the MTSS framework (Sailor et al., 2021). Teachers were responsible for identifying student struggles with Tier 1 instruction and must work to provide Tier 2 interventions to support students in fully understanding lesson concepts.

Do

The staff at the MNAS-ALP worked to identify any students that are struggling with course concepts as the students work through courses in Edgenuity. Teachers were required to have weekly one-on-one meetings with each student that was assigned to their classroom. Teachers completed weekly progress sheet to document student progress for each course they were enrolled in (See Figure 6). Teachers then utilize the one-on-one meetings to identify student progress and grades in each course.

Professional Learning Team meetings (PLTs) are a weekly requirement for teachers in our ALP. Teachers met weekly with the instructional coach to review student progress data for their Edgenuity courses. The intent of the PLT meetings was for teachers to collaborate with each other and the instructional coach to accurately assess how students are progressing academically. PLT meeting minutes were recorded and shared in the PLT minutes folder for the

problem-solving team to review (See Figure 7). Teachers used the PLT meetings to determine which students need to be moved into Tier 2 support of the MTSS model. The first plan of action for Tier 2 interventions were to provide students with the opportunity to receive increased academic support. Teachers worked in PLTs to develop a plan of support interventions that will be utilized as interventions for students.

Effective progress monitoring is needed to ensure that the MTSS framework is implemented with fidelity (Freund et al., 2021). The MNAS-ALP administration worked with staff to ensure that they were consistently monitoring student progress through weekly one-on-one meetings with students, PLT meetings and Problem- Solving Team meetings. Teachers met with students weekly to review their progress and prescribe interventions. Grade level teams met weekly in Professional Learning Teams to review student progress and share best practices for student support. The administration team and instructional support staff met bi-weekly to review student progress and identify any students that needed more intense Tier 3 supports.

I provided students with a student perception survey to gather data on their perceptions about their own learning needs (See Appendix F). The student perception survey was provided to students through one-on-one meetings. I also provided high school staff with professional development on how best to conduct and collect data from the weekly one on one meetings with students. Teachers were provided with the opportunity to reflect on the weekly one-on-one meetings with their students. I provided data from the student questionnaire to the high school staff during the PLT meetings. The high school staff was able to compare student perceptions with their own weekly meeting data. This process ensured that we are accurately meeting the needs of student academic needs based on their own perceptions and staff reflections from the weekly progress meetings.

Edgenuity Student Weekly Goal Sheet							
Name:					Grade/School:		Date:
Courses:							Teacher:
Goals are:							
Total Time per week:			Grade % Earned:		# Lessons Completed/Week:		
Week	Total Active Time	Total # Lessons	Grade	Date	Student Initial	Teacher Initial	Comments
4/3-4/6							
Actual							
4/3-4/6							
Goal							
4/11-4/14							
Actual							
4/11-4/14							
Goal							
4/17-4/21							
Actual							
4/17-4/21							
Goal							
4/24-4/28							
Actual							
4/24-4/28							
Goal							
5/1-5/5							
Actual							
5/1-5/5							
Goal							
5/8-5/12							
Actual							
5/8-5/12							
Goal							
5/15-5/19							
Actual							
5/15-5/19							
Goal							
5/22-5/26							
Actual							
5/22-5/26							
Goal							
5/30-6/2							
Actual							
5/30-6/2							
Goal							

Figure 6. MDNS Alternative Learning Program Student Weekly Goal Sheet.

PLT name: _____ **Date:** _____ **Facilitator:** _____

Time Keeper: _____ **Note Taker:** _____ **Participation Monitor:** _____

Members Present: _____

- ☐ **Planning PLT** (content, instructional strategies)
- ☐ **Assessment PLT** (planning for/creating common assessment)
- ☐ **Analysis of Student Work (Data) PLT** (analyze student learning on CFA)
- ☐ **Intervention/Extension PLT**

Time	PLT Focus	Notes
1 minute	Welcome & Overview	
1 minute	Norms & Protocols	
10 minutes	What do students need to know and be able to do? (Planning PLT)	
10 minutes	How will we know that they have learned it? (Assessment/DATA PLT)	
5 minutes	What will we do when they haven't learned it? (Intervention PLT)	
5 minutes	What will we do when they already know it? (Intervention PLT)	
5 minutes	Current Instructional Strategies/Practices	
5 minutes	Goal Setting	
5 minutes	Action Planning	
5 minutes	Wrap-Up & Reflections	
4 minutes	Next Steps/Assignments	

Additional Comments:

Student Updates

Figure 7. MDNS ALP High School Professional Learning Team Meeting Minutes

There were two main interventions that were utilized to support students that are in the Tier 2 level of interventions. The first intervention that teachers utilized for student academic support was guided notes. Students often struggle on the assessment portions of courses in Edgenuity. Teachers provided students with guided notes to support them in retaining content related material for the courses they are struggling with. The guided notes also served two major purposes for student support.

One major purpose of the guided notes was to provide students with a structured way to access content information. Guided notes took away the task of students that are struggling, to take organized notes. The other major purpose of guided notes was to provide students with content related material to reduce the stress of having to recall information. Many of the students enrolled in our ALP struggle with reading comprehension, and struggle to retain information. The guided notes provided these students with instant support by having instant access to course content material.

The other main intervention that was utilized to support Tier 2 students is one-on-one support. One-on-one support provided students with time during the instructional day to complete work under the direct supervision of a teacher or support staff. The timeframes for the one-on-one support ranged from 15 to 30 minutes per student. Teachers that saw a trend in student academic struggles worked with the students to identify the need to provide one-on-one academic support. The need for one-on-one support was discussed with the students during the weekly one-on-one meetings. The confidentiality of the weekly meetings allowed students to speak honestly about their need for one-on-one support. The teachers then communicated this to the parents when they are providing updates on their child's progress. The effectiveness of the Tier 2 interventions were reviewed and discussed in the weekly PLT meetings.

The problem-solving team met bi-weekly to review each student's progress in regard to course work in Edgenuity. The problem-solving team looked at each student's individual progress while cross-referencing their findings with the data from weekly PLT meetings. The problem-solving team then looked at other factors that may adversely affect a student's academic performance. The team then reviewed the attendance, grades and behavior of each student to determine how best to provide supports at the Tier 2 and 3 levels. The problem-solving team then determined which students needed to transition to Tier 3 interventions and supports.

Tier 3 interventions are interventions that provide the most intense supports for students that are struggling academically (Sailor et al., 2021). Many of the factors that hinder student learning require intense supports for students. Repeated discipline issues can lead to poor academic performance. Excessive absences can also lead to a lack of sound instructional time. Mental Health is also a factor that can hinder student academic progress (Kearney and Graczyk, (2020). These adverse factors were addressed by exposing students to interventions that are provided through an MTSS framework. The problem-solving team worked to identify the needed areas of support and prescribed them to each student appropriately.

The problem-solving team met to address any student struggles that continued beyond the Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions that were provided. Students that continued to struggle academically were provided with content specific support by a certified teacher. For example, if a student was still having math struggles, the team worked to provide that student with intense one on one support in the area of math. Students that have poor academic performance often struggle due to the lack of foundational skills that may have been taught in earlier grades (Pascoe, 2020). The Tier 3 one-on-one support allowed the teacher to provide direct instruction

in math with the hope of helping the student understand foundational concepts. This same process applied to all subjects and content areas that students may struggle with.

The problem-solving team also worked to identify other factors that may hinder student academic progress. The team then worked to utilize other interventions and resources to support students that are considered to be in Tier 3 of the MTSS framework. At-risk students often have poor academic performance due to struggles with mental health, learning disabilities and effects from traumatic experiences (Pascoe, 2020). The problem-solving team routinely took all of these factors into consideration when reviewing student academic progress.

At-Risk students often have excessive absences from school. (Kearney and Graczyk, (2020). The problem-solving team reviewed and discussed Tier 3 students that have excessive absences. High absenteeism can result in significant learning gaps due to the lack of exposure to instruction (Pascoe, 2020). The problem-solving team then made contact with the school social worker to investigate the issue. The school social worker then reported back to the problem-solving team their findings about the high number of absences. The problem-solving team used the information gained from the school social worker to support the student in attending school more consistently. The aim of this process was to support the student in establishing consistent attendance. It was the hope of the problem-solving team that consistent attendance will lead to consistent exposure to instructional interventions.

At-risk students often struggle with repeated discipline issues in school (Losen & Martinez, 2020).). The problem-solving team reviewed all students that are struggling academically due to repeated discipline issues. The team reviewed the discipline referrals to see how best to support students with improving their behavior. The problem-solving team used the school counselors and administration team as a resource to improve student behavior. The school

counselors and administration team worked one-on-one with students and their parents to help improve student behavior. The school counselors and administration team worked to develop strategies that sought to minimize discipline violations. The aim of the problem-solving team was to minimize student behaviors, so that students had consistent exposure to instructional interventions. It is believed that consistent exposure to instructional interventions would lead to improved academic performance.

At risk students often struggle academically due to mental health issues and the effects of traumatic experiences (Pascoe, 2020). The problem-solving team reviewed and discussed any students that were struggling academically due to mental health issues or the due to effects of traumatic experiences. The problem-solving team utilized the school nurse to better understand the diagnosis of students with mental health issues. The school nurse worked with the team to understand the types of medications the student had been prescribed. The school nurse also helped the team understand what supports the medication provided in relation to the student's diagnosis. The school nurse also worked with local medical providers to assist families with appointments and obtaining important information on how to support students at school.

The problem-solving team also worked with the social worker and the administration team to better understand the documented traumatic experiences that students have experienced. Students that have experienced traumatic experiences often exhibit high anxiety, anger and depression (Gee, 2020). These factors can greatly affect the academic progress of students in school. The problem-solving team utilize the school counselors to support the students that were affected by these factors. School counselors were available to provide one-on-one support for students. The school counselors also worked with parents and students, to enroll them into in-school therapy. The intent of these supports was to establish a safe space for students that

struggle with mental health or are struggling with the effects of traumatic experiences. The problem-solving team worked to ensure that students got the proper medical care and emotional support while attending school. It was the intent of the problem-solving team to provide sound care and support that allowed students to have consistent exposure to learning and support interventions.

Study

I collected, analyzed and compared student perception interview data with teacher reflection data on their weekly student progress meetings. I followed up with staff by conducting observations of PLT and Problem-Solving Team meetings to gauge consistency with progress monitoring within our MTSS framework.

The administration team worked with the staff to analyze the academic growth of students that have been exposed to the MTSS framework supports and interventions. The credits earned, and progression of students in their coursework were reviewed through professional learning teams and the problem-solving team. These data points were also measured in relation to student support and growth in areas that require therapy, health support and any other areas of need that may hinder learning.

Act

Phase II of this study allowed me to work with the inquiry partners to fully implement an MTSS framework within our district's ALP. Phase II allowed the staff to prescribe supports and interventions aimed at supporting students academically. Several of the supports and interventions were directly related to academic interventions. There were also supports that were aimed at supporting students with struggles that indirectly hindered their academic progress. The staff worked to assess the needs of all students, while also working to support the learning of

core content material. The overall approach of this study was to analyze the experiences of the staff members that are providing the interventions and supports. It was our aim to improve the academic progress of students that are enrolled in our ALP by reflecting on the effectiveness of the interventions and supports that are provided to our students. All data collected from staff, students and parents were used to make needed adjustments to the layered support and interventions provided to students through our MTSS framework.

Phase III

Plan

There were several pieces of data collected in phase III of this study. Data was collected from staff members to obtain their perceptions and experiences on the implementation of the MTSS framework. Staff perceptions and experiences on MTSS framework supports and interventions were also collected. Student and parent perceptions and experiences on the MTSS framework support were collected to see how the student's points of view compared to the staff points of view.

Do

I worked to gauge the perceptions and experiences feelings of staff members on the impact of MTSS interventions on students that are enrolled on our district's ALP. High school staff members participated in focus group in order to collect data on their opinions and experiences on the MTSS interventions. The data collected from the focus group allowed me to assess the staff members point of view of how MTSS intervention's impact on student academic progress.

I also conducted a focus group with high school students that were enrolled in our district's ALP. I gained permission to conduct the interviews initially from the school district.

Parents and students were also provided with permission and assent forms asking for permission to interview students. (See Appendix A) I used the data collected from the focus group and parent interviews to gauge staff, student and parent opinions on how the MTSS framework interventions impacted the academic progress of students enrolled in our program.

Study

Phase III of this study allowed me to review data on the impact of Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions provided by classroom teachers. This study also allowed the me to review data on how impactful Tier 3 interventions were on student academic progress. The main goal of our ALP is to support students in earning credit toward graduation. Data on teacher and student experiences provided me with a tangible measurement on how effective to the MTSS framework interventions and supports were within our ALP.

Act

The aim of this study is the improve the process by which we support students academically within our ALP. We as a staff worked to refine our supports and interventions by analyzing the experiences of our staff, students and parents in regard to providing and receiving MTSS supports. After obtaining and analyzing the data, I will present these findings to all stakeholders of our alternative learning program. I will initially present the data to our staff to continue the process of improvement within our ALP. I will also share these findings with our Student Services and our 6th -12th grade directors. Our program is supported by the Student Services department through the work done with our counselors, social workers and school nurse. Our ALP program is also supported by the office of secondary education with curriculum, course content and other academic resources. The aim will be to improve the process by which we support students by working collaboratively with our central office support staff and our ALP

staff. An inquiry design table was developed to guide me in collecting data and conducting the inquiry (see Table 3).

Inquiry Design Rigor

It is vital that rigor is established during the process of this study to ensure that trustworthy practices are followed. Rigor in research is essential in ensuring that appropriate research methods enhance the trustworthiness of a research study (Johnson et al., 2020). As the scholarly practitioner, it was important that I address any biases that may skew any data collected for this study. The administration team served as equity partners to assist with data analysis. The administrator for our ALP is well versed in the practices and procedures of our ALP. He was very effective in supporting me by ensuring that all the data is sound and accurate. I worked with the administration team and the stakeholders in my study to utilize the member checking process. I was able to use member checking to ensure that my study processes are accurate credible and valid (Mertler 2022).

I worked with the stakeholders in my study to review and develop the questions for the student perception interviews that were administered to students to collect data on student perceptions about their learning needs. This study also allowed me to work with the middle school staff to develop a set of survey questions that will be the most effective in collecting data from the high school students that are participating in this study. An assent form was used to provide the participants with sound information on the study to ensure that students and parents were well informed about the study. It was my hope that this would lead to great participation, that yielded sound data from the student perception interviews and focus group.

I also worked with stakeholders to help develop the focus group questions for staff and students. Obtaining input on the questions for both data sets

Table 3

Inquiry Matrix of Guiding Questions, Method, Data Source, Phase of Inquiry, and Data Analysis

Inquiry Guiding Question	Method	Data Source or Instrument	Phase of Inquiry	Data Analysis
What are the perceptions and experiences of staff members that are providing MTSS interventions to students enrolled in our ALP?	Survey	MTSS Belief Survey	1	Descriptive Statistical Analysis
	Professional Development	Teacher Reflections	2	PLC Notes Individual Responses
	Interviews	Focus Group with ALP staff	3	Thematic Analysis
What are the perceptions and experiences of ALP students, and the parents of students that are being supported with MTSS interventions?	Interviews	Student Perception Interviews	2	Descriptive Statistical Analysis
	Interviews	Focus Group with ALP students	3	Thematic Analysis
		Interviews with Parents	3	Thematic Analysis
How does implementation of the MTSS framework influence leadership skill development of the scholarly practitioner?	Weekly Journal	Scholarly Practitioner Journals	1,2,3	Thematic Analysis

allowed me to develop sound questions from the different points of view of staff members. Each staff member's role in our ALP provided them with the opportunity to serve students from different perspectives. The teachers were able to provide questions from the instructional intervention point of view, while the counselors were able to provide questions from the emotional support interventions point of view. Our school social worker, and school nurse aided me in providing questions geared toward the effectiveness of school support from the health and basic needs point of view. I was able to provide questions that reach into all perspectives of MTSS framework support. It was my hope that these effective questions would provide me with well rounded, accurate data that addresses all points of view from a diverse group of student participants.

This study was a mixed-method research design. The focus groups and interviews used in this study collected quantitative and qualitative data. It was necessary for me to address the internal and external validity of all data collected for this study. Internal validity addresses the extent to which data that is collected in a study is accurate in regard to the population that is being studied (Li & Frank, 2022). Each student and staff member were provided with a letter that explains the reasoning and background for the focus groups and interviews. Threats to the internal validity could be low participation or questions that are not answered with honest responses. I explained to staff members, students and parents that there would be no repercussions from not participating in the focus groups or interviews. I explained to staff and students the benefit and the overall aim of the focus groups and interviews in regard to how this study may benefit a greater number of students.

External validity is the process by which data is collected from a broad population of participants, to draw sound inferences on a study (Findley et al., 2021). I used coding to

disaggregate and organize the data collected from the focus groups and interviews. The triangulation method was used to converge all of the information that is developed from the data (Mertler, 2022). I used data to form an overall picture on how effective the MTSS interventions were from the perspectives of staff, students and parents. It was understood that due to the diverse nature of the study participants, that there may be outlier responses from students, staff and parent interviews and focus groups. Every staff member student and parent response was utilized to refine the MTSS framework to ensure that our ALP students are provided with sound interventions and supports that aid them in being successful in school. All data collected for this study was reviewed and analyzed to ensure that they are appropriate for this study.

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

Delimitations are restrictions that limit the scope of a study (Mertler, 2022). This sought to gain insight on MTSS interventions through the perceptions of the staff that are providing the interventions and supports. Data was collected through focus groups and interviews, and the findings from these interviews were dependent solely on information reported by staff, students and parents. I did not make any attempts to validate the interview responses with the actual behaviors of the staff members or students.

Limitations are factors that may have adverse effects on research, and are beyond the control of the scholarly practitioner (Mettler, 2022). The design of this study was to analyze the experiences of staff, student and parents on the impact of providing MTSS interventions to at-risk students that are enrolled in our alternative program. One potential limitation in this study was caused by the inconsistent patterns of student enrollment into our ALP. There is no set timeframe for when students are referred and enrolled into our program. The inconsistency with enrollment timeframes limits the amount of time that staff may have to provide MTSS supports

to students. I worked to limit the effects of inconsistent enrollment, by identifying students that enrolled in the early stages of the Fall semester.

Assumptions are factors within this study that are assumed to be true, but may not have any evidence to support them (Mertler, 2021). For the purpose of this study, it was assumed that all of the staff in our ALP have a solid understanding of the MTSS framework. Is it also assumed that staff in our ALP had a solid understanding of the MTSS framework Tier levels, and how to prescribe the appropriate interventions for each Tier. There were several assumptions related to student ability, student approach to learning and other factors that may affect students' approach to learning. It was assumed that all students possess varying levels of effort toward school success. These assumptions may be related to their cognitive ability, and the home environment outside of school.

As the scholarly practitioner, I worked to minimize the effects that these delimitations, limitations and assumptions will have on my study. I worked to inform all of the staff and student participants about the purpose and process of collecting data for this study. I met with all staff participants through planned staff meetings and pilot studies to inform them about my study. I also met with all parents and student participants in my study to inform them about the purpose, aim and processes for this study. It was my hope that by meeting with the staff, student and parent participants, that I was able to minimize any misunderstandings about this study. I also worked to provide informational transparency that will hopefully lead to honest responses and sound data on the MTSS interventions and supports.

Role of the Scholarly Practitioner

As the scholarly practitioner, I serve as the Coordinator of Alternative Learning for the Eastern County School District. As the Coordinator of Alternative Learning, I serve to oversee

and supervise the alternative learning programs. I work to give guidance to our ALP site and district personnel in identifying, planning, developing and implementing alternative learning programs for students across our school district. I am closely related to the context and content of the problem of practice for this study. I am in direct contact with district staff, and ALP staff on a daily basis. I also work closely with students and parents to ensure that students are enrolled and are progressing through our program while they are enrolled in our ALP.

The development of this study problem of practice was driven out of my extended observations as a former building principal, and as the current Coordinator of our ALPs. As a principal, I have 10 years of experience in observing the struggles that students can have in a traditional school setting. As the Coordinator of ALPs, I now see the struggle of students in the ALP setting. My experiences and observations have motivated me to research how best to support students that are considered to be at-risk in our ALP.

For this study, I was the person that oversaw the implementation of an MTSS framework within our ALP. I worked with the administrator, teachers and support staff to effectively implement the MTSS framework with fidelity within our ALP. As the scholarly practitioner, I also worked to make contact with parents and students about participating in this study. I was also the person that administered surveys and facilitated interviews and focus groups to all study participants.

As the Coordinator of Alternative Learning, I am in authority over staff and students that work and are enrolled in our ALP. I serve as the supervisor for all staff to ensure that all aspects of our program are being followed. I also supervise students and work with students to ensure that they understand our ALP's protocols, procedures and expectations. I work directly with staff

parents and students while also relying on our ALP staff to directly serve our parents and students through the protocols that we have implemented for our ALP.

I worked closely with the ALP staff to inform them about this study to obtain buy-in and feedback on the most efficient way to conduct this study. I also worked with the administrator, teachers and support staff to develop sound survey questions to provide for parents and staff. I used this same approach to develop sound interview questions for students. As the scholarly practitioner, I worked with the ALP staff to review data that was collected to ensure that it was valid and accurate. It was my hope to facilitate a collective approach to improvement within our ALP. I aimed to use my positions as the Coordinator of ALPs and the scholarly practitioner to conduct a sound study that was collectively supported by the district and the staff of our ALP. The overall goal for this study was to establish a collective approach by our entire ALP staff in supporting at-risk students in being successful in school.

Summary

In conclusion, this study sought to improve student academic performance by exposing students to MTSS framework interventions and supports. The data from the focus groups and interviews were used to assess how well interventions and supports helped students academically. Furthermore, the data from the staff focus groups were used to improve how the ALP develops and implements best practice strategies. My focus was to utilize the information from surveys, interviews and focus groups to enhance the process of supporting the students enrolled in our ALP academically.

As the scholarly practitioner, it was also my aim to identify the barriers that hinder learning for students that are enrolled in our ALP. The data and insight provided by the ALP staff supported this study in developing practices that will combat the effects of the factors that

can lead to students being at-risk of not succeeding in school. These findings also assisted the district in meeting the goals of the Strategic Plan for 2025-2030 for alternative Education. Lastly, a major piece of this study was to obtain student perceptions and experiences on the MTSS interventions and supports that they received while enrolled in our ALP. The data obtained from the student interviews were compared to the data obtained from staff and parents. Analyzing this data will ensure that our ALP is providing the most effective supports to ensure that our students are successful in school.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to analyze the experiences of staff members that are providing MTSS interventions to students enrolled in an alternative learning program (ALP). This study also collected data from students that received MTSS interventions and supports. Students were provided the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and opinions on the MTSS interventions that were utilized to support them. The study also worked with the parents of students that were enrolled in our ALP. Parents were interviewed to obtain their thoughts and opinions on the MTSS interventions used to support their children.

Data that was collected from staff, students and parents was analyzed to develop three main findings in this study. Staff, students and parents all found that the MTSS interventions and supports provided in our ALP provided staff, students and parents felt that the MTSS interventions and supports provided therapy for trauma and a supporting learning environment. Staff, students and parents also felt that the MTSS interventions were effective in helping students be academically successful.

This study was conducted at the Meeting the Needs of All students Alternative Learning Program (MNAS-ALP). MNAS-ALP is located in the Eastern County School district and serves grades Kindergarten through 12th Grade. MNAS-ALP has been in existence for 15 years as the alternative learning program of Eastern County Schools. The ALP initially was created to provide a school option for high school students that had been long-term suspended from school. This option was intended to serve two purposes. The first purpose was to give high school students the option to continue to earn credit towards graduation. The second purpose was to keep students off the streets, and to decrease their chances of getting into trouble in the community.

MNAS-ALP has evolved over the years, and now serves Elementary, Middle and High School students. The reasons for student enrollment in our ALP have also shifted. Students are not just enrolled in the ALP for discipline reasons. Many parents and students opt to self-enroll at MNAS-ALP for various reasons. These reasons range from needing a smaller setting to dropout prevention. The majority of the students enrolled in the ALP have one thing in common, and that is that they have been affected by some at-risk factor that has hindered their progress in school.

At risk factors that affect many of the students enrolled in our ALP are repeated discipline violations, excessive absences, trauma and mental health. The Multi-Tiered System of supports (MTSS) framework has been utilized for several years within the Eastern County School District. The MTSS framework has primarily been utilized in the traditional schools in the Eastern County School district to address at-risk factors that affect student learning. The aim of this study is to implement the MTSS framework within our ALP. This study will also seek to analyze the effectiveness of the MTSS framework through data that collects the thoughts and opinions of high school staff, students and parents on the MTSS Framework interventions and supports.

This study is a mixed methods sequential study conducted over the span of a school year. The purpose of this study is to analyze the experiences of staff, students and parents on the MTSS framework interventions that have been used to support students in our alternative learning program. The following research questions guided the study in regard to analyzing how our staff, students and parents felt about the MTSS framework interventions provided to students in our ALP.

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of staff members that are integrating MTSS interventions to at-risk students enrolled in the MNAS-ALP?
2. What are the perceptions and experiences of MNAS-ALP students, and the parents of ALP students that are being supported with MTSS interventions?
3. How does implementation of the MTSS framework influence the leadership skill development of the scholarly practitioner?

This chapter will go into detail on the three phases of the research study. This chapter will also provide insight on the implementation and data collection involved in this study. Demographics on the study participants will be provided in relation to the participants' thoughts and opinions on the MTSS interventions utilized in our alternative learning program. I will also discuss the analysis and the results of the data collected from the study participants.

Participant Demographics

There are three different sets of participants for this study. The first set of participants are the teachers and support staff (See Table 4). The study focused on providing high school students with MTSS interventions. These staff members were selected to participate in this study, because they work closely with the high school students in providing interventions and supports. The second set of participants are the high school students (See Table 5). These students were randomly selected to participate in this study. One piece of criteria that was used to select the student participants is the timeframe of their enrollment to our program. Students that enrolled into our program in the Fall semester of the 2024/2025 school were selected, because they would have been exposed to the MTSS framework for the majority of the school year. I felt that these students had been fully immersed in the MTSS framework interventions, and were able to provide meaningful feedback on their experiences.

The third set of participants were parents of the students selected to participate in the study (See Table 6). The parent participants were also be able to provide meaningful feedback, due to their children having been exposed to the MTSS framework for a substantial amount of time. The parent participants also had the opportunity to work with the staff in our program as we work to support students with their struggles with behavior and academics. Interviewing both the parent and student participants allowed me to correlate the thoughts and opinions of each on the MTSS framework interventions and supports used in our alternative learning program.

Participants in Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative data collection phase included staff participants completing the MTSS Belief Survey (See Appendix I). The first step in implementing the MTSS framework involves establishing a culture of belief among the staff members that will be providing the interventions and supports. Staff members must buy into the belief that all students can learn, despite factors that may cause students to struggle in school. The belief survey is a survey that is provided to staff members in the beginning of the school year that gauges the staff's overall feeling about how at-risk students can succeed in school. The Belief Survey was provided to all high school teachers and support staff within our ALP.

Participants in the Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative data collection phase included students and staff participating in focus groups (See Appendix F and G). These two focus groups allowed me to obtain the thoughts and opinions of staff and students on providing and receiving MTSS framework interventions and supports. Students were also provided with the opportunity to participate in student perception interviews prior to the focus groups (See Appendix E). The student perception interview was utilized to obtain student opinions on their academic strengths and weaknesses. The qualitative

Table 4

Staff Participants

Staff Member	Role	Years of Experience	Date of Focus Group
Mitch	Program Administrator	32	4-15-25
Faith	Instructional Coach	30	4-17-25
Adam	High School Teacher	8	4-15-25
Victoria	High School Teacher	20	4-17-25
Donnie	High School Teacher	10	4-15-25
Mickey	School Counselor	26	4-15-25
Violet	School Counselor	18	4-15-25
Rita	School Social Worker	31	4-15-25
Tonya	School Nurse	25	4-15-25
Kimberly	School Therapist	8	4-15-25
Fannie	Teacher Assistant	2	4-15-25

Table 5

Student Participants

Student	Race	Gender	Grade	Reason for Enrollment	Date of Perception Interview	Date of Focus Group
Kim	African-American	Female	11th	Discipline Violation	2-6-25	5-9-25
Tom	Hispanic	Male	12th	Discipline Violation	2-7-25	5-9-25
Julia	African-American	Female	11th	Discipline Violation	2-7-25	4-10-25
Bobby	White	Male	10th	Discipline Violation	2-10-25	4-10-25
Tyler	African-American	Male	9th	Discipline Violation	2-10-25	4-10-25
Bonnie	African-American	Female	10th	Parent Choice	2-10-25	4-10-25
Tonya	African-American	Female	10th	Parent Choice	2-10-25	4-10-25
Kendrick	White	Male	10th	Parent Choice	2-10-25	4-10-25
Jasmin	African-American	Female	10th	Parent Choice	2-11-25	4-10-25

Table 6

Parent/Guardian Participants

Parent/Guardian	Student	Race	Gender	Date of Perception Interview
Valerie	Kim	African-American	Female	4-3-25
Brianna	Tom	Hispanic	Female	4-4-25
Jill	Julia	African-American	Female	3-31-25
Taylor	Tyler	African-American	Female	4-8-25
Talia	Bonnie	African-American	Female	3-31-25
Lucy	Tonya	African-American	Female	4-3-25
Baylor	Kendrick	White	Female	3-31-25
Tina	Jasmin	African-American	Female	3-31-25
Connie	Bobbie	White	Female	4-4-25

data collection for this study also included parents that participated in one-on-one interviews (See Appendix H). The parent interviews were utilized to obtain the thoughts and opinions of parents on the MTSS interventions and supports that were provided to students enrolled in our alternative learning program.

Staff members that worked directly with our high school students were selected to participate in my study. Students and parents were randomly selected to participate in the study. There was one criterion considered when selecting students and parents for my study. Students that had been enrolled in our alternative learning program since the Fall semester were selected due to the length of time that they have been exposed to the MTSS framework interventions. The parents of these students were subsequently asked to participate to obtain data from the same set of related participants.

Implementation

This study was conducted in 3 phases. This study focused on the implementation of the MTSS framework within our high school program. High school staff, students and their parents were used as consenting participants in this study. A pre-survey and perception interviews were conducted with the staff and students in phases 1 and 2 of this study. Phase 3 consisted of me conducting focus groups with staff and students. One-on-on parent perception interviews were also conducted with the parents in phase 3 of this study.

Phase I

Phase 1 of this study began with the planning and implementing of the MTSS framework within our alternative learning program. In Phase 1 of this study, staff members were trained through professional development sessions on the MTSS framework. Staff members participated in district wide trainings, as well as training provided during the opening staff workdays for the

2024/2025 school year. Staff members were provided with the MTSS belief survey to gauge the overall staff feelings about how students with academic struggles can grow academically.

Phase II

Phase 2 of this study consisted of our staff implementing the MTSS framework within our ALP. During phase 2, staff members were allowed to provide input on how best to provide Tier 1,2 and 3 interventions to students enrolled in our ALP. Participating students were provided with a perception survey to obtain their overall feelings about their academic strengths and weaknesses. The student perception survey also allowed the students to share how best their learning needs can be supported by staff. The student perception survey provided me with the opportunity to share the data from the surveys with the staff. I worked with the staff to compare this data to what the staff members were seeing in regard to their observations on student progress. The survey data and teacher observations allowed us to develop a sound plan of Tier 1,2 and 3 interventions for students enrolled in our ALP.

Phase III

Phase 3 of this study consisted of me collecting the final pieces of data from staff, students and parents. I conducted a focus group with the participating high school students enrolled in our ALP. The focus group allowed me to obtain the students' thoughts and opinions of the MTSS framework interventions and supports that were provided to them while enrolled in our ALP. I also conducted a focus group with the high school staff members. The staff focus group allowed me to obtain the thoughts and opinions of staff members that provided MTSS framework intervention and supports to the high school students enrolled in our ALP. Lastly, I was able interview the parents of the participating students in this study. The parent perception

interviews provided me with the opportunity to collect data on the parent's perception of the MTSS framework interventions that were provided to their children while enrolled in our ALP.

Data Collection

The data collection for my study took place between, March 24th and April 15th 2025. IRB approval was granted by the University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMIRB) in January 2025. Approval was also granted by the Pitt County School District in September 2024. The data collection process began once approval was provided by both institutions.

Quantitative Data Collection

The MTSS Belief survey was first provided to the staff in the phase 1 of my study (See Appendix I). The Belief Survey was provided to the staff with the intent of gauging the staff's feelings on the ability of struggling students to learn and succeed academically. The MTSS Belief Survey is a seventeen-question survey that was shared with the staff as a google document. Staff members completed the survey anonymously on August 28 2025. Completing the MTSS Belief Survey is a required step for schools that are implementing the MTSS framework within their buildings.

Qualitative Data Collection

I used one-on-one interviews in phase 2 to collect qualitative data for my study (See Appendix E). I conducted one-on-one interviews with 9 high school students to gain insight on their academic strengths, academic weaknesses and their perspective of how they learn best. The interviews also allowed me to collect data on what these students felt were the best supports for their learning. The one-on-one interviews took place in my office over a span of three days. The interviews took place on 2/9/2025, 2/10/2025 and 2/11/2025. My aim was is to provide the data

from the student interviews to the teachers during the professional learning team meetings. Our goal was to compare the interview data with the data that teachers are collecting from their weekly one-on-one meeting with their students.

The high school students that participated in my study were invited to participate in a focus group (See Appendix G). The focus group took place on 4/10/2025 in the Career Development classroom. There were 9 students that participated in the focus group and the session lasted 24 minutes. The students completed consent forms and gave permission to be audio recorded for the focus group. Questions from the interview protocol were used in the focus group. Students were allowed to elaborate on their answers and the researcher asked additional questions. The audio recording of the interview was transcribed and the transcription is 16 pages long.

Staff members that participated in my study were invited to participate in a focus group. There were 9 staff members that participated in the focus group session (See Appendix F). The focus group was conducted in person on 4/15/2025 in the conference room in our building. Staff members were provided with the consent forms and signed the forms prior to the focus group. Each staff member gave permission to be audio recorded for the focus group session. Each staff member was allowed to answer and elaborate on each question and topic. The researcher did ask follow-up and clarifying questions. The focus group lasted 1 hour and 34 minutes. The audio recording of the focus group was recorded and is 41 pages long.

In phase 3 of my study, I conducted interviews with the parents of students that are enrolled in our alternative learning program (See Appendix H). I was successful in obtaining consent for students along with the coinciding parents. The parent interview questions were designed to gain the thoughts and opinions of parents on the MTSS interventions that we

provided to our students. The parent interviews took place over the span of two weeks. My goal was to compare the parent perceptions with the staff and student perceptions within my study.

Data Analysis

In this explanatory sequential mixed methods study, both quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analyzed to answer the three research questions. Data from the staff Belief Survey, student interviews, staff and student focus groups were reviewed to identify common findings. The findings that were identified from the data collection allowed me to effectively compare the thoughts and feelings of staff, parents and student participants on the MTSS framework interventions utilized in our alternative learning program.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data is data that can be measured or represented numerically (Mertler, 2022). Quantitative data analysis was vital in collecting data that measures the thoughts of staff members about at-risk students' ability to learn. I was able to use the MTSS Belief Survey to obtain quantitative data for my study.

MTSS Belief Survey Analysis

In phase 1 of my study, the staff members in our alternative learning program were provided with the MTSS Belief Survey. The MTSS Belief Survey is an online survey that was provided to the staff as a google document. The purpose of the MTSS Belief Survey is to gauge the staff's feeling on how well students that struggle with school learn. The biggest hurdle to establishing an effective environment of learning for all students, is to get total "buy in" from the staff as a whole (Johnson, 2023). The MTSS strategies and interventions are powerless if the staff that is providing them do not believe that students can learn despite their academic and

behavioral struggles. The belief survey was provided to the staff within our alternative learning program during the opening week workdays leading up to the start of the 2024/2025 school year.

The belief survey was provided to the staff as a google document. Analysis of the survey was seamless in that the google document feature allowed me to chart each question's response by the staff members. The answer choices for each question were Strongly Agree, Agree, Strongly Disagree, Disagree and Neutral. Every question on the belief survey was collected and charted based on the percentage of staff member responses to each question. Table 7 provides the responses to the survey by ALP staff (See Table 7). Figure 8 provides a tally of staff responses to the MTSS Belief Survey. Figure 8 shows that there was an overwhelming number of staff that strongly agreed and agreed to the questions on the Belief Survey (See Figure 8).

The Belief Survey consisted of 17 questions that were provided to staff members. All of the survey questions seek to obtain data on how staff members feel about student struggles, and how they relate to tiered support. However, question 1 is the most important question in this survey, in that it asks if staff members believe that all students can learn, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities. 11 out of 14 staff members either agreed or strongly agreed that all students can be proficient in learning standards, regardless of their race, socio economic status or academic ability (See Figure 7).

Questions two through six asked the staff their opinions on the effectiveness of tiered support for students that struggle academically. Staff responses on these questions showed that 11 out of 14 staff members either agreed or strongly agreed to these survey questions. Questions 7 through 10 ask the staff their opinions about the ability of students with special needs and excessive behaviors to achieve academic benchmarks. Staff responses showed that 11 out of 14 staff members either agreed or strongly agreed with these survey questions (See Figure 7).

The responses for question 13 shows that 11 out of 14 staff members agreed that additional time and resources should be allocated to students that are not meeting the expected academic benchmarks. The responses for question 14 show that 10 out of 14 staff members agreed that tracking student academic performance allows staff members to identify performance issues and prescribe interventions. Questions 15,16 and 17 show that 11 out of 14 staff members agree that interventions need to be assessed for effectiveness and that families need to be involved in problem solving when students do not respond to initial interventions (See Figure 7).

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data is data that describes the thoughts and concepts of study participants on a topic or process (Mertler, 2022). For my study, I was able to conduct a staff focus group, student perception interviews and a student focus group to collect qualitative data. I was also able to conduct interviews with parent participants to collect qualitative data.

Student Perception Interviews Data Analysis

I conducted student perception interviews with each student to gain insight on how best to provide MTSS interventions and supports to students. The student perception interviews were conducted with each student individually. I conducted the student perception interviews one-on-one with the students in my office. There were 9 students that participated in the student perception interviews (See Table 8). My aim was to give the students the opportunity to provide their thoughts about their own academic struggles, and how those struggles could be supported.

Table 7

MTSS Belief Survey Results

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
I believe all subgroups can reach proficiency with current standards.	5	7	2	0	0
Core Instruction should be effective enough to result in at least 80% of students achieving benchmarks in Reading with Tier One alone.	2	9	3	0	0
Core Instruction should be effective enough to result in at least 80% of students achieving benchmarks in Math with Tier One alone.	1	11	2	0	0
Universal instruction in behavioral expectations and social skills is the responsibility of public schools.	2	7	3	0	2
The primary function of Tier Two is to ensure students achieve grade level benchmarks.	1	9	4	0	0
The primary function of Tier Three is to ensure students achieve grade level benchmarks.	1	9	4	0	0
The majority of students with Specific Learning Disabilities can achieve grade level benchmarks in Reading.	0	7	5	0	2
The majority of students with Specific Learning Disabilities can achieve grade level benchmarks in Math.	0	8	5	0	1
The majority of students with behavioral problems can achieve grade level benchmarks in Reading and Math.	0	12	2	0	0
Additional staff support would enable regular education teachers to implement more differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students.	4	9	1	0	0
Prevention and early intervention results in fewer referrals to Special Education.	2	10	1	1	0
Some students have a Specific Learning Disability do not have a true disability but rather did not receive instruction and intervention of adequate intensity to close the gap in their skill levels.	1	3	6	0	4

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree	Disagree
Additional time and resources should be allocated first to students not reaching benchmarks.	2	11	1	0	0
Graphing student data makes it easier for educators to make decisions about student performance and needed interventions.	1	10	2	1	0
A student's family should be involved in problem-solving.	8	5	0	1	0
When students do not respond to instruction and/or intervention, the following should be examined: a) the intervention was implemented with fidelity, b) the intervention was delivered with sufficient intensity, and c) a different intervention is needed.	5	8	1	0	0
When students do not respond to instruction and/or intervention, teams should ensure that the problem was thoroughly analyzed through diagnostic assessments/processes to find the root cause of the skill gap.	6	7	1	0	0

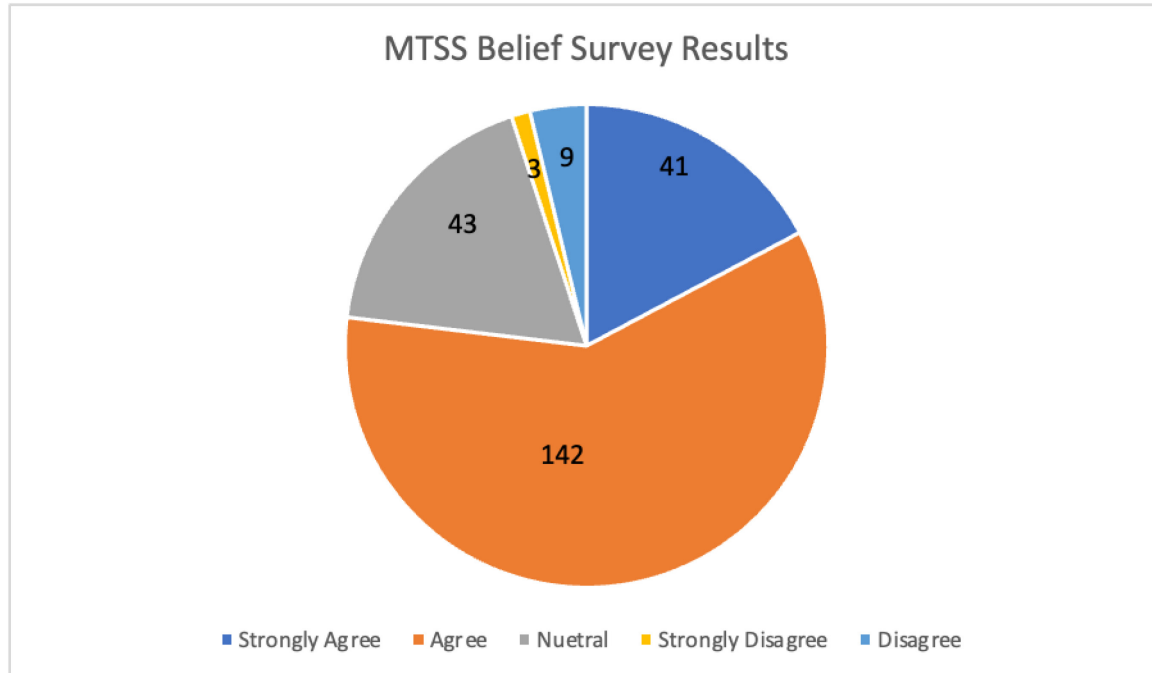


Figure 8 MTSS Belief Survey Results Total Question Responses

Table 8

Student Perception Interview Summary Matrix

Interview Question	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5
Students	Reason for Enrollment	Feeling about School/Learning	Academic Strengths	Academic Weaknesses	What strategies are most helpful
Kim	Discipline	School is for my best interest	Good student that enjoys History and English	Math	One on one help from teachers, small quiet space to learn.
Tom	Discipline	I don't have an interest in school.	Really good in all subjects	I lose focus very easily	Hands on Learning, knowing that staff truly cares
Julia	Discipline	I love school	Math/Science	English/Reading	Support from teachers, working in pairs or groups
Bobby	Discipline	I did not like school initially, but now I am excited about school.	I have good focus, English/reading, History	Math	Support from teachers. I like when teachers verbalize that they are there to support me.
Tyler	Discipline	I like school.	English/Reading	Math	Help from my teacher.
Bonnie	Parent Choice	I feel that school is important	Social Studies	Math, Easily Distracted	One on One help from my teacher.
Tonya	Parent Choice	I like school and learning.	Writing/The Arts	Math	Visual learning strategies, one on one support from my teachers.
Kendrick	Parent Choice	I like school	Reading	Math	One on One help from my teachers.
Jasmine	Parent Choice	I like school	Math	Social Studies/English	Hands on activities, small settings where I get more one on one attention.

I used the data from the student perception interviews to share with the staff. The staff then used this information to tailor each student's individual support plan. Teachers then used this data to drive their weekly one on one meetings with students, while the professional learning teams would also use this data to determine how best to support students as a whole.

The student perception interviews consisted of 5 questions that centered around the student's reason for enrolling in our ALP, their academic abilities, and how they feel best supported (See Appendix E). Question 1 asked the students why they were enrolled in our ALP. The student answers varied between being referred due to discipline violations to enrolling as a parent request. There were 5 out of 9 students that enrolled in our ALP due to discipline violations while 4 out of 9 enrolled at the request of their parent or guardian (See Table 8). The second question asked the students how they felt about school and learning. All of the students felt that school and learning was important. Tom was the only student that expressed that he did not have an interest in school even though he felt that school was important (See Table 9). Some of students felt their experiences with academic struggles made school less enjoyable.

The third and fourth questions of the student perception interview asked the students about their academic strengths and weaknesses. The responses from the students were mainly centered around their abilities in particular subject areas. Some of the students stated that they did well in one subject while struggling in another. Kim stated that she was good in English and History while Julia stated that she was good in Math and Science. There were 5 out of 9 students that stated that math was the subject that they struggled in school. Tom and Bonnie stated that they struggled with staying focused while in school (See Table 8). The majority of the students did feel that they were easily distracted while attending their base schools. The students that had discipline violations stressed the fact that the larger student numbers in their base schools led to

them having more conflict with students. A few of the students stressed that their focus was interrupted as a result of triggered anxiety due to the larger numbers of students attending their base schools.

The final question of the student perception interview was a two-part question that asked the students how they best learned, and what supports or teaching strategies were most helpful to them. Kim, Bonnie and Kendrick stated that they learn best in a smaller environment. Jasmine and Tonya stated that the smaller environment lessened their anxiety triggers, and that it was reassuring to have access to the various staff members due to the smaller settings (See Table 8). In regard to the most helpful teaching strategies, several of the students really liked the self-paced format that Edgenuity provides. The students highlighted the fact that they could work independently with needed support from teachers when they needed it. One common response that I received from all of the students was that they felt that the support and genuine concern from the staff was the most beneficial support that they received while in our program. Bobby and Tom stated that the care and support from staff members was great motivation that encouraged them to put forth their best effort to succeed in school despite their struggles (See Table 8).

Student Focus Group Data Analysis

In phase 3 of my study, a student focus group was conducted to obtain student perceptions on the MTSS interventions and supports that were provided to them while enrolled in our alternative learning program. I obtained consent from the students to participate by having the parents sign a consent form, and by having the students sign an assent form to participate in my study. The student focus group was conducted on April 10th in a classroom room at the Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning Program. The focus group survey

consisted of 6 questions. I was able to also ask follow-up questions to gain more insight from staff participants. There were 9 students that participated in the student focus group (See Table 5).

Each student was seated around a table located in the classroom. I provided the information about the focus group, reminding the student participants that they had previously consented to being audio recorded. I also assured the student participants that all identities and answers would be kept confidential, and that no information on their identities would be provided in this study. I provided instructions on how the focus group would flow with each student participant, having the opportunity to provide an answer to each question. Table 9 provides a summary of responses from student participants during the focus group (See Table 9).

The first focus group question asked the student participants to name one thing that they felt they struggled with in school. Tonya stated “I struggle with people.” I asked a follow up question asking, “Are you saying that you struggle with being around to too many people?” Tonya replied “yes” Jasmine then stated “I struggle with being around too many people also.” I then asked, “how does being around too many people effect you?” Tonya replied, it triggers my “anxiety.” I then asked Jasmine if this was the same effect that she experienced, and she replied “yes.” The remainder of the students stated that large crowds of people was something that did affect them in a negative way. Julia stated that she does not have anxiety from too many people, but it does cause her to be more engaged in the social happenings, rather than focusing on important class information. She went on to say that she is easily distracted (See Table 9). Kim mentioned that being around too many people in her base school often caused her to have conflicts with other students. She stated that this would lead to her getting into physical altercations. Several students agreed that this is what led them to having the discipline violations.

Table 9

Student Focus Group Summary Matrix

Focus Group Questions	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 3 Follow-up	Question 4
Students	What are some of your school struggles?	Were you made aware of the intervention being used in our ALP?	Do you feel that the interventions helped you improve academically?	What aspects of the academic interventions helped support you?	What would your parent/guardian say were the most beneficial interventions used in our ALP? What would they say about your academic performance?
Kim	Getting into trouble	Yes	Yes, helped me to pass classes for graduation	I like the small classes. The teachers really care. I like having someone to talk to.	That the small classes helped me focus
Tom	Lack of interest in school	Yes, by my teachers	Yes, I would not have graduated without the support.	The genuine care of staff.	Relationships developed with staff.
Julia	School is too big; I get easily distracted.	Yes	Yes, I have been able to complete my classes.	I like the small class sizes. Encouragement from staff.	The smaller environment helped me focus.
Bobby	My anxiety triggered by being around too many people	Yes	Yes	The staff is helpful.	The flexible options and smaller environment helped with my anxiety.

Focus Group Questions	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 3 Follow-up	Question 4
Students	What are some of your school struggles?	Were you made aware of the intervention being used in our ALP?	Do you feel that the interventions helped you improve academically?	What aspects of the academic interventions helped support you?	What would your parent/guardian say were the most beneficial interventions used in our ALP? What would they say about your academic performance?
Tyler	Behavior	Yes	Yes	It's quiet	Helped me pass my classes.
Bonnie	Getting into trouble/Math	Yes	Yes, I have completed my classes.	I like the one -on-one help we get from teachers, and having staff close by when I need help.	That the staff and smaller classes helped me pass my classes and stay out of trouble.
Tonya	I struggle with people. Too many people	Yes	Yes, I have completed more classes.	I like having the teachers and counselors available to talk. I used the guided notes a lot.	That the staff caring about me has helped me focus and get more classes done.
Kendrick	Easily distracted/Math	Yes	Yes, I have completed more classes here.	The guided notes.	That the structure and small setting has helped me have a better focus on school.
Jasmine	Too many people	Yes	Yes, I have been able to get caught up with my credits.	I like the one-on-one help I get from the teachers.	That I have passed more classes.

Which caused them to be referred to our ALP. Bonnie added that she also struggles to learn in classes with lots of people, due to her being easily distracted. Other student responses to this question were centered about student struggles in a particular subject. Tyler and Julia stated that they struggled with reading, and Kendrick stated that he struggled with math (See Table 9).

The second question that was asked to the student participants asked them if they were made aware of why they were being exposed to academic interventions and supports while enrolled in our ALP. The group as a whole replied “yes.” I asked a follow up question on how they were made aware. Kim stated that teachers often talked to the class as a whole about being successful, and encouraged the students to ask for help. Bobby stated that his teacher often reminded the students about the resources that were available to them for help with work. Tom stated that one thing that he quickly realized was that the staff in our ALP are more accessible than the staff at his base school. Several students agreed with Tom about staff being more accessible. Julia and Bonnie agreed that the constant support from the counselors and administrators helped inform them about the supports that were available. The rest of the group agreed that the constant check-ins and communication from the support staff let them know how they were being supported (See Table 9).

The third question of the student focus group asked “Do you feel that the interventions that you were exposed to while enrolled at MDNS ALP helped you improve in the academic area that you struggled with?” Kevin stated yes, and I asked the follow up question “how so?” Kevin stated “In my base school, I did not complete any work” He went on to say “I have actually finished some classes here” I asked Kevin was there a particular intervention that he felt helped the most. Kevin replied “The guided notes were a big help to me, because I could focus on the reading without also having to take notes on it. I asked the entire group if any of them utilized

the guided notes like Kevin. Jasmine stated “yes” They helped me the same way as Kevin.” Julia agreed that having the guided notes was a relief, because she struggles with reading (See Table 9).

I asked the group how they liked the one-on-one support they received from the staff. I asked the students if they utilized the one-on-one support from staff members. The group as a whole agreed that one-on-one support was a big help. Kim stated that she did not utilize the one-on-one help very much, but she liked that fact that she had it available. The other students agreed that it was reassuring to have two staff members available in the classroom to support them when they needed. Tonya stated that she liked that the counselors, and administrators were also around to provide one-on-one support. She went on to say “Not just for school work, but for other things that we may be struggling with (See Table 9).

I then asked a follow-up question by asking the group if they utilized in-school therapy while enrolled in our program? Tonya stated “I was not assigned to the therapist, but I often met with the counselors when I was having a bad day.” Kim agreed that the counselors were great about meeting with me when I need to see them. The group agreed that they benefited from having the staff available to provide one-on-one time for academic and non-academic reasons. I then asked the student participants specifically about the benefits of the weekly one-on-one meetings with teachers. Tom also stated that the one-on-one weekly meetings were very helpful in that teachers used the meetings to motivate him to get his work done. Kendrick agreed by stating that the one-on-one meetings helped hold him accountable for getting work done. The group agreed that the one-on-one meetings helped them stay on track with setting goals and finishing courses. Tom stated that he really appreciated the encouragement that he received from all of the staff. He stated that this was the biggest reason that he graduated (See Table 10). Each

student agreed that the constant encouragement from all the staff was a great motivator for them to work hard, even when other things were hindering them.

The fourth question that I asked in the student focus group was “what would your parent or guardian say about your academic performance while enrolled in our ALP? Tyler stated “My mom would be surprised that I have done some work, and she is going to be happy.” Julia stated that “her mother would have a positive response about me getting my work done.” Jasmine stated that her mother would say “This is a blessing” referring her academic improvement while enrolled in our ALP. The remainder of the students agreed that their parents would be happy with them completing more work and classes, as a result of the supports that were received while enrolled in our program (See Table 9).

The fifth and last question of the student focus group asked the group if they would recommend any changes to the process by which we provide interventions and supports. None of the participants recommended any changes to the MTSS framework being utilized in our alternative learning program. Many of the students expressed that it was reassuring to know that they had one-on-one access to teachers and teacher assistants when needed. The students also stated that the guided notes were beneficial in relieving the strain of having to listen to new material while capturing the notes. Several students stated that they benefited from therapy sessions with the school therapist and the school counselors. The students all expressed that the MTSS interventions were huge factors in their completing more classes and graduating from high school.

Staff Focus Group Data Analysis

I conducted a focus group with the staff to gauge their thoughts and opinions on the MTSS interventions that they provided to the students enrolled in our alternative learning

program. The focus group was conducted on April 15th in the conference room at the Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning Program. The focus group was scheduled after school to ensure that all participants would be available to meet. The focus group survey consisted of 6 questions. I was able to also ask follow-up questions to gain more insight from staff participants. There were 11 staff members that participated in the staff focus group. (See Table 4).

Each staff member was seated around the conference room table. I provided the information about the focus group, reminding the staff participants that they had previously consented to being audio recorded. I also assured the staff participants that all identities and answers would be kept confidential, and that no information on their identities will be provided in this study. I provided instructions on how the focus group would flow with each staff member, having the opportunity to provide an answer to each question. I also reminded the staff participants to speak from their respective areas of expertise in regard to how these areas determined the types of interventions that were provided to our students. Table 10 provides a summary on staff focus group participant responses (See Table 10).

The first focus group question asked the staff participants if they believed that all students can grow academically regardless of race, economic status or level of academic ability. The follow up question to this was how can schools support students to ensure academic growth? This question is directly correlated to the Belief Survey, in that staff members must first believe that all students can learn despite academic struggles. There was an overwhelming consensus amongst the staff participants that they believed that all students can grow academically, in spite of their ability, race or academic ability (See Table 10). Adam stated that is it important for each student to have tailor-made support that best fits their needs.

Table 10
Staff Focus Group Summary Matrix

Focus Group Questions	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Questions 6
Staff	Do you believe that all students can learn?	How did your students respond to the interventions that were provided to your students?	What do you feel were the most effective supports and interventions that were provided to your students?	In your opinion, what would your students say were the most beneficial aspects of the academic interventions you provided this school year?	What outcomes have you noticed or documented from providing supports and interventions to your students this school year?	What recommendations or changes would you make to the process by which the interventions and supports are provided to students in our ALP?
Mitch	Yes, especially when they experience some academic success.	Students are more receptive with relationships and trust are developed.	Supporting the whole child academically and emotionally	Support with academics and other basic needs that students may not receive at home.	Increased enrollment and credits earned.	Ensuring that our facilities are up the date with the lasted technology to support staff and students.
Faith	Yes, students have a better chance to learn in smaller classroom settings.	Students were receptive, especially, after experiencing some success.	I support students indirectly by helping teachers develop and access academic support resources.	Small setting	Increased courses passed	More space
Adam	Students respond well to a nurturing environment	Students respond well with time.	Guided notes, student rely heavenly on them in my class	Guided notes and other support with course work.	Improved confidence.	More space to serve more students.

Focus Group Questions	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Questions 6
Staff	Do you believe that all students can learn?	How did your students respond to the interventions that were provided to your students?	What do you feel were the most effective supports and interventions that were provided to your students?	In your opinion, what would your students say were the most beneficial aspects of the academic interventions you provided this school year?	What outcomes have you noticed or documented from providing supports and interventions to your students this school year?	What recommendations or changes would you make to the process by which the interventions and supports are provided to students in our ALP?
Victoria	Yes, when they receive supports with academics as well as behavioral support.	Students have been receptive to my support, because I believe that I create an environment in my classroom that makes it ok to ask for help.	One on One support was effective due to the small classroom environment.	Small environment with staff that truly care about them	Increase in the number of graduates	None
Donnie	Yes, all students can learn through support and love.	Students are receptive when trust is developed	One on One support has been effective,	Small environment	Improved effort from students and more classes being passed.	None
Mickey	Yes, I think that all students can grow at their own pace in different areas	Students respond well to transparency.	Students respond well to a positive environment	Support with academics, social, physical and mental needs.	More students earning credit towards graduation	More support staff to support students with their academic and mental health.

Focus Group Questions	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Questions 6
Staff	Do you believe that all students can learn?	How did your students respond to the interventions that were provided to your students?	What do you feel were the most effective supports and interventions that were provided to your students?	In your opinion, what would your students say were the most beneficial aspects of the academic interventions you provided this school year?	What outcomes have you noticed or documented from providing supports and interventions to your students this school year?	What recommendations or changes would you make to the process by which the interventions and supports are provided to students in our ALP?
Violet	Yes, especially when students are given the opportunity to discuss their academic goals.	Students are receptive to emotional or mental health need support	Mental health support by working with students one-on-one	Mental Health support	Increased number of students receiving mental health support and more classes passed.	More space and support staff
Rita	Yes, students can learn in the right setting.	Students welcome food and clothes.		Support with basic needs like food and clothing.	More students are attending due to the supports	None
Tonya		Students are receptive to support.	Medication assistance is an effective support	Support with their health needs	More academic success due support with health and care plans.	None
Kimberly		Students are receptive to therapy.	Support students with mental health struggles through therapy.	Mental Health Support	More students receiving therapy and experiencing school success.	More therapist and therapy time for students.
Fannie	Yes, with the proper support	Students respond well to our setting.	Love and care (Positive Environment)	Loving environment	Students are more confident in their abilities.	Continue with our plan of supporting students.

Donnie stated when a teacher believes in a student's ability, that student's chance of academic success greatly increases. Mickey stated that he feels that differentiated instruction is key to ensuring that all students grow academically.

The second question asked the participant's opinion on how students responded to the specific interventions they provided. Violet stated that she feels that meeting with the students to determine what they need, and setting goals has been very effective. She stated that this allows her to get a true feel for how the students want to be supported, and helps build trust by getting "buy in" from the student. Kimberly, the school-based therapist stated that she initially gets mixed responses from students when she begins sessions with them. She stated that students are often hesitant to meet with her for therapy sessions. She went on to say that the majority of her students look forward to their sessions after visiting with her a couple of times. Several of the staff participants referenced how important trust is with our students. Rita, the school social worker stated that allowing students to have a platform to communicate with staff members helps build trust with students (See Table 10).

The third question in the focus group asked the staff participants their opinions on how effective the interventions of one-on-one support and guided notes were in supporting academic growth in our students. Fannie, one of our teacher assistants stated that providing students with the guided notes reduces the stress of them having to read the material and capture notes at the same time. Mickey added to this statement by saying that students experience frustration due to their struggles with reading while also having to take notes on what they are reading. He went on to say that the guided notes give the students a sense of security, and it reduces any possible avoidance with completing assignments. Both Fannie and Victoria felt that the guided notes were beneficial in helping students understand key concepts in various subject areas (See Table 10).

Victoria stated that the one-on-one support is very popular with her students. Victoria's experience with the guided notes shows that students feel more confident when they have staff support available when they need it. Faith the instructional coach, followed up on Victoria's statement by pointing out that the smaller classroom setting supports the availability of staff to provide more one-on-one support. Adam agreed with this statement by saying the students love the fact that they have access when they may need him for support with course work. The entire group agreed that teaching students how to properly take notes was important, and that the guided notes provided students with great examples of what good notes look like (See Table 10).

The fourth focus group question posed a question to the staff members, asking what would the students say were the most beneficial aspects of the interventions that staff provided this school year. Faith, Victoria and Donnie stated that students would say that the smaller learning environment is most beneficial. Violet, Kimberly and Tonya felt that students would say that the support with Mental Health was the most beneficial aspect of the interventions provided to them. Mitch the program administrator stated that he feels that students felt good about getting their basic needs met. Rita, the school social worker agreed that students really appreciate receiving basic necessities, to help with some of the things they may not have at home. Adam stated that students would say that the guided notes were the most beneficial support received within our ALP (See Table 10).

The fifth focus group question asked staff members about the outcomes that they have noticed or documented from providing supports and interventions to students in our ALP. The staff participants stated that they feel that there is a direct correlation between the interventions and an increase in student confidence. The staff participants all agreed it was evident in the

students' approach to their academics that they trusted the staff members that supported them and that they felt good about themselves as students (See Table 10).

The last question of the staff focus group asks the staff participants what recommendations or changes would you make to the process by which you provide interventions to support your students? The majority of the staff participants felt that we were effective in how we supported our students academically. However, the consensus from the participants was that we needed to work closer with the base schools to provide them with some of the interventions that are effective in our program. The staff participants felt that the base schools should be utilizing similar interventions for at-risk students enrolled in their schools (See Table 10).

Parent Perception Interviews Data Analysis

In phase 3 of my study, I conducted perception interviews with the parents of the students that are enrolled in our program, and who participated in my study. Consent to participate was obtained by having the parents sign the consent to participate form. I met with each parent to provide information about my study, and what would be required if they consented to participate. The aim of the parent perception interviews was to obtain the thoughts and opinions of parents on the MTSS framework interventions and supports that were provided to their child while enrolled in our alternative learning program. The parent perception interviews were conducted from March 31st to April 9th. The parent perception interviews were conducted with each parent individually over the phone while also using Webex to audio record the interviews. The parent perception interviews consisted of 6 questions. I was able to also ask follow-up questions to gain more insight from staff participants. There were 9 parents or guardians that participated in the perception interviews (See Table 6). A summary of parent interview responses is provided on Table 11 (See Table 11).

The first parent interview question asked about why the student was assigned to our ALP. These answers varied from parent choice to discipline violations. The second question asked the parents about their child's biggest needs before enrolling in our ALP. The majority of the parents mentioned that their child needed a smaller setting. They stated that the base schools were too big which caused their child to have repeated discipline offenses or avoid school due to high anxiety. The parents then explained that this caused their child to struggle academically. Valerie and Jill stated that their children struggled with student conflict and repeated discipline offenses while attending the larger base school setting. Tina and Connie stated that their children struggled with anxiety while attending the larger school settings (See Table 11).

The third question asks the parents, if they were aware of any interventions and supports that their child received while enrolled at MDNS-ALP? Connor, Taylor and Valerie all stated that they knew that the smaller class size was one intervention that has played a major factor in their child's success within our ALP. Briana, Talia and Lucy stated that they knew about the one-on-one support that their child received while enrolled in our ALP (See Table 11). The fourth question in the parent interview asked the parents if they were satisfied with the instructional supports that their child received while enrolled in our ALP? Each parent stated that they were satisfied with the supports provided to their child while enrolled in our ALP (See Table 11). Each parent answered yes, and their reasons for saying yes all centered around their student's improvement in completing work, earning credits toward graduation and decreasing discipline violations. Valerie stated that Kim has done well and has displayed great behavior while enrolled in our ALP. Lucy stated that she is very pleased with Tonya's progress in that she is completing classes in our program, when she was not completing any while attending her base school. Jill stated that she was pleased with Julia's progress in that she was able to stay on track to graduate

with her assigned class (See Table 11). While each student had different struggles, their parents were pleased that they were able to continue to complete courses while enrolled in our program.

Baylor stated that she was pleased with the motivation and genuine care of the staff that worked with Kendrick. She also spoke of how the smaller setting has helped Kendrick be more engaged with completing work. Taylor stated that she was very pleased with the instructional support the Tyler has received. She also stated that for the first time ever, Tyler looked forward to attending school every day. Brianna stated that the genuine care for Tom's success is what helped him succeed while enrolled in our program. Tina stated that the smaller setting and one-on-one support helped Jasmin work through her struggles with anxiety. Lucy stated that the therapeutic support from the counselors was a big help with helping Tonya be successful in school (See Table 11).

The fifth question asked the parents if they were aware of any specific interventions and supports that were very beneficial to their child while enrolled at MDNS-ALP? Lucy stated that she was well aware of the one-on-one support that her child received while in class. She stated that she was well aware of the therapy that she received while enrolled in our ALP. Other parents like Brianna stated that she knew about the encouragement that Tom received from his teachers, the counselors and the administrators (See Table 11). Tina stated that Jasmin suffers from severe anxiety, and she knows that she has received great support from her classroom teachers, teacher assistants and the counselors. Connie responded by saying that she was aware of how the program utilized flexible scheduling to provide Bobby with one-on-one time with his teacher (See Table 11).

Question 6 asked the parent participants if they had any other thoughts and opinions on the interventions and supports that their child received while enrolled at MDNS-ALP? Each

parent was positive in their response, stating that their child had shown improvement with their academics while enrolled in our ALP. Several of the parents thanked me and the staff for our support in helping their child succeed. Baylor mentioned that Kendrick does have a lot of catching up to do, but she was grateful that he has made progress while enrolled in our program (See Table 11). Several of the parents noted that their child felt safe and trusted our ALP staff members. The parents felt that this trust enabled their children to focus on their academics, which led to more work being completed and more credit being earned toward graduation.

Findings

Data collected and analyzed for this study led to the development of three findings that gauged the thoughts, opinions and experiences of staff, students and parents about the MTSS interventions used in our ALP. The data from this study also shows that staff, students and parents felt that the MTSS interventions and supports provided therapy for trauma and a supporting learning environment. Staff, students and parents also felt that the MTSS interventions were effective in helping students be academically successful.

Traumatic Experiences and Therapy

Traumatic experiences and school-based therapy were important factors that emerged in this study. Staff, students and parents all expressed that traumatic experiences played a major role in hindering the learning process for students. Each participant group also highlighted the need and importance of therapy to support students in healing from their traumatic experiences. Therapy was seen by all participant groups as an intervention that supported students in being academically successful while dealing with the negative effects of their traumatic experiences.

Table 11

Parent Perception Interview Summary Matrix

Interview Questions	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Questions 6
Parents	In your own words, why was your child assigned to Meeting the Needs Alternative Learning Program?	Upon enrolling at MDNS-ALP, what were your child's biggest needs for academic and behavioral support?	Are you aware of any interventions and supports that your child received while enrolled at MDNS-ALP?	Are you satisfied with the instructional supports that your child received while enrolled at MDNS-ALP?? Why or why not?	Are there any specific interventions and supports that you thought were very beneficial to your child while enrolled at MDNS-ALP?	Do you have any other thoughts and opinions on the interventions and supports that your child was exposed to while enrolled at MDNS-ALP?
Valerie	Discipline Referral	Fighting, and constant conflict with other students.	I feel that the smaller class sizes have helped her stay out of trouble and focus on her work.	Yes, the support she is given has given her encouragement, and the push to focus on her academics.	She speaks highly of her teacher and teacher assistant and how they support her when she is struggling.	No
Brianna	Discipline Referral	He always struggled with school.	I know that you guys provided him with individual help and constant encouragement	Yes, the supports that he has received has help him graduate.	You allowed him to push himself, while cheering him on. This greatly motivated him	I just want to say thank for supporting him and helping him graduate.
Jill	Discipline Referral	Conflict with other students has hindered her progress.	Yes, I know that she talks about getting help from her teachers.	Yes, she has been able to stay out of trouble and complete classes.	She talks about her teachers and how much they support her.	No, I am thankful for you and your staff.

Interview Questions	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Questions 6
Parents	In your own words, why was your child assigned to Meeting the Needs Alternative Learning Program?	Upon enrolling at MDNS-ALP, what were your child's biggest needs for academic and behavioral support?	Are you aware of any interventions and supports that your child received while enrolled at MDNS-ALP?	Are you satisfied with the instructional supports that your child received while enrolled at MDNS-ALP?? Why or why not?	Are there any specific interventions and supports that you thought were very beneficial to your child while enrolled at MDNS-ALP?	Do you have any other thoughts and opinions on the interventions and supports that your child was exposed to while enrolled at MDNS-ALP?
Taylor	Discipline Referral	Getting into trouble	No	Yes, he has looked forward to attending school and is completing work.	He likes the small classes and he likes the help that he gets from his teachers.	No, thank you for all that you have done for him.
Talia	Parent Referral	She struggled with staying on task. The larger class setting caused her to be easily distracted.	Yes, I know that she received help from her teachers in her classroom with assignments.	Yes, she has been more productive with completing work and classes.	The smaller setting has been the biggest difference for her success. She also benefited from have people in the school that she can talk about her struggles with.	Yes, I feel that she has grown significantly, but she could benefit from more face-to-face teaching and less online learning.
Lucy	Parent Referral	She skipped school and did not complete any classwork. She had lots of absences	Yes, I know that she gets help from the teachers, teacher assistant and ya'll (Admin)	Very satisfied, she actually likes going to school and she is completing more work than she ever has.	I know she enjoys having someone to talk to when she is having tough days.	No, thank you for all that you have your teachers do for her.

Interview Questions	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Questions 6
Parents	In your own words, why was your child assigned to Meeting the Needs Alternative Learning Program?	Upon enrolling at MDNS-ALP, what were your child's biggest needs for academic and behavioral support?	Are you aware of any interventions and supports that your child received while enrolled at MDNS-ALP?	Are you satisfied with the instructional supports that your child received while enrolled at MDNS-ALP?? Why or why not?	Are there any specific interventions and supports that you thought were very beneficial to your child while enrolled at MDNS-ALP?	Do you have any other thoughts and opinions on the interventions and supports that your child was exposed to while enrolled at MDNS-ALP?
Baylor	Parent Referral	Yes, he did not complete very much work. Lack of motivation.	He is still struggling some, but is completing more work due to the smaller setting and individual attention he gets from teachers.	Yes, he is completing more work and has actually completed some classes.	The support from admin, teachers and the consistent communication have helped him improve academically.	Yes, he needs to do more, but is doing much better in your program than he was in his base school. You guys are awesome.
Tina	Parent Referral	The traditional school setting was too big for her. She struggled with anxiety, staying on task and focusing. The smaller setting is better.	Yes, she likes the one-on-one help that she receives from teachers, counselors and the therapist.	Yes, I feel that the support that she has received has helped her pass more classes for graduation.	The small setting has been helpful in helping her feel good about going to school.	I feel that the supports have helped her with her academics and her emotional well-being.

Interview Questions	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5	Questions 6
Parents	In your own words, why was your child assigned to Meeting the Needs Alternative Learning Program?	Upon enrolling at MDNS-ALP, what were your child's biggest needs for academic and behavioral support?	Are you aware of any interventions and supports that your child received while enrolled at MDNS-ALP?	Are you satisfied with the instructional supports that your child received while enrolled at MDNS-ALP?? Why or why not?	Are there any specific interventions and supports that you thought were very beneficial to your child while enrolled at MDNS-ALP?	Do you have any other thoughts and opinions on the interventions and supports that your child was exposed to while enrolled at MDNS-ALP?
Connie	Parent Referral	He struggled with high anxiety being triggered by the larger school setting.	He often says that you guys' care, but the biggest thing to me is the smaller classroom setting.	Absolutely, he has completed more classes while enrolled in your program.	The relationships that you have formed with him, and showing him that you care has made the biggest difference with him being successful in school.	No, thanks for all of your help with him.

Student Feelings on Traumatic Experiences and Therapy

Several of the students spoke about how traumatic experiences effect their ability to focus in the traditional school setting. Tonya stated that her experiences outside of school make it hard for her to deal with large crowds of people. She stated that she “skipped school a lot, because she was very anxious about going.” This caused her grades to suffer, and she fell behind in school. Kendrick stated that he had a similar experience in his base school. He stated that his traumatic experience has led to intense struggles with anxiety, that hinders his ability to complete course work (See Table 9). Both students stated that the smaller environment provided within our ALP has helped them improve their focus with school.

The student participants expressed that in-school therapy was a great benefit to them as an MTSS intervention (See Table 9). The students all had different perspectives on how they received therapy while enrolled in our program. Bonnie stated “that she did not see the school therapist much, but she did receive therapy from the school counselors when needed. Tonya stated that she relied heavily on the school counselors for support when she needed to speak with someone (See Table 9). Several students stated that they often struggle with mental health, and having someone readily available to speak to at school was a great help.

Staff Feelings on Traumatic Experiences and Therapy

All of the staff members spoke about how traumatic experiences have affected the vast majority of students enrolled in our program. Our school counselors Mickey and Violet, spoke about how trauma has led to an increase in struggles with anxiety and mental health for the students served in our program. Our school-based therapist, Kimberly discussed how traumatic experiences lead to students needing to be exposed to therapy to learning how to effectively cope with the effects of traumatic experiences (See Table 10).

Our School Social Worker Rita, talked about how living in poverty can be considered a traumatic experience for students. The School Nurse, Tonya spoke about how health struggles and illness could be a very traumatic experience for students. She felt that the lack of food, clothing and sound living conditions can have a negative effect on students' ability to perform academically in school. The program administrators noted that student behaviors are often the result of how students have been negatively affected by their traumatic experiences (See Table 10). The consensus of the staff participants was that traumatic experiences are the root cause of student struggles with behavior and academic progress.

The staff participants stated during the focus group that therapy is vital to students that have traumatic experiences. Kimberly, the school therapist stressed the importance of providing the students with the opportunity to receive school-based therapy. Several of the teachers noted that their students look forward to their therapy sessions, and often ask for the school-based therapist during class. The school counselors Mickey and Violet stated that they often provide therapy at the request of students due to situations that arise outside of school (See Table 10). The staff participants agreed that the option for school-based therapy was an effective intervention that supports students enrolled in our ALP.

Parent Feelings on Traumatic Experiences Therapy

Several of the parent participants stated that their children had experienced traumatic experiences that caused them to struggle in school. Lucy stated that "her child had experienced some tough situations" (See Table 11). Several parents stated that their children needed support with academics, mental health and behavior, as a result of traumatic experiences. Connie stated that her child's struggles with anxiety are the result of traumatic experiences (See Table 11).

Several of the parent participants felt that their child benefited from therapeutic interventions provided to their children (See Table 11). Lucy stated “that her child likes having someone at school they can talk to.” Talia stated that her child has benefited from the relationship built with staff members. Valerie stated that her child had fewer issues with behavior, as a result of having access to staff members that provided therapeutic services for her (See Table 11).

Supportive Learning Environment

One common theme found in the data for this study was that each of the study participant groups expressed that our ALP provided a supportive learning environment. Each group mentioned the importance of small class sizes, access to support staff and that overall staff care for students as major factors in the academic success of students enrolled in our ALP.

Student Feelings on Supportive Learning Environment

Several of the student participants expressed that the large environments within their base schools caused them to struggle with consistently attending school, behavior and completing course work. Tonya and Jasmine spoke about how the large numbers of students were too much for them and often triggered their anxiety. Several of the student participants stated that the larger school settings were too distracting for them. Julia and Kim stated that they often got into trouble by avoiding class or getting into conflicts with other students (See Table 9). Table 5 shows that 5 out of the 9 student participants were referred to our ALP as a result of a discipline violations (See Table 5).

Our ALP classrooms are capped at 15 students per class. The student participants noted that the smaller class sizes are a great benefit to them. The students pointed out that the smaller quieter classrooms allow them to focus on getting coursework completed. Tonya stated that she

likes the smaller classroom, because it gives her instant access to her teachers. Kendrick stated that he likes that more than one staff member is in the room, because it gives the students a greater opportunity to get individual help (See Table 9).

Data collected from the student focus group shows that students feel that the smaller setting provided within our ALP gives student greater access to support staff (See Table 9). The student participants noted that they liked having the option to see an administrator, counselor or the school therapist when needed. During the focus group and the student perception interviews, several students stated that they often deal with struggles outside of school. Julia stated that she greatly benefited from the encouragement of staff members (See Table 9). Student participants went on to say that the support staff within our ALP provides support and resources for many situations that take place outside of school. Bonnie state that she liked having access to staff for support when she needed it (See Table 9).

The student participants stressed the importance of feeling safe, and knowing that staff genuinely cares about their well-being. Data from the student perception interviews highlight a consistent response from the student participates concerning the care and nurturing provided by the ALP staff. Tom stated that he appreciates all of the interventions that are provided by the ALP staff. He stated that “the one thing that motivated him was knowing that the staff cares about him” (See Table 9). Students identified that trust and comfort with staff were indicators that staff members cared about their overall well-being. The students concluded that this was a huge motivator for them while enrolled in our ALP

Staff Feelings on Supportive Learning Environment

The staff participants felt that at-risk students need the proper environment to succeed. In the focus group several staff members stressed the importance of providing students with a sound

nurturing learning environment at school. Mickey, the school counselor stated that he believed that the students enrolled in our program are successful, because we have created an environment that causes students to feel safe. He continued to elaborate by saying that students develop trust when they feel safe and are free to communicate their academic and behavior needs to the adults that are serving them. Several staff agreed and stated that developing trust allows students to inform staff about what they truly need support with (See Table 10). This in-turn, allows the staff to accurately prescribe the appropriate interventions to support them.

Rita the school social worker stated that providing the basic necessities for students is important for academic success. She stressed the importance of working with staff, parents and students to ensure that students have access to food, shelter and clothing. The staff participants agreed that the lack of these essentials can greatly affect a student's ability to focus on school success (See Table 10). Violet stated that simply providing students with food through the Backpack Buddies program ensured that students would leave school on Fridays with food for the weekend. Mickey reiterated the fact the building trust with students created an environment where students feel comfortable communicating their basic needs to staff. Mickey stated that without building trust, we would not be able to know how to support our students' basic needs (See Table 10).

Parent Feelings on Supportive Learning Environment

The majority of the parent participants stated that their children struggled academically, emotionally and behaviorally due to the large school settings at the base schools. The parents also felt that their children greatly benefited from the smaller learning environment that our ALP provided (See Table 11). Valerie and Jill felt that the smaller environment helped their children avoid conflict with other students. Lucy and Connie stated that the smaller learning environment

minimized any triggers due to anxiety for their children (See Table 11). In the eyes of the parent participants, the smaller learning environment greatly contributed to the academic success of their children.

MTSS Interventions are Effective

Data collected from this study shows that staff, students and parents felt that the MTSS interventions and supports utilized in our ALP were effective in helping students be successful. Each group felt that the one-on one support was a very effective intervention in supporting students in our ALP. Guided notes were another intervention that the staff and students pointed out as an effective support for students.

Student Feelings on MTSS Interventions

The student participants felt that one-on-one support was beneficial to them while enrolled in our ALP. Kim stated that “she felt good knowing that she had instant access to her teachers when needed.” Tonya stated that she utilized one-on-one support regularly, and felt that it really helped her with understanding classwork.” The data collected during the student focus group showed that students felt confident knowing they could access individual support from their teachers. Tom stated that “having someone readily available to support me, motivated me to do my best to complete assignments.” The consensus from the majority of the student participants was that one-on-one support was a very beneficial intervention that supported them in obtaining academic success (See Table 9).

One MTSS intervention that was provided frequently to students enrolled in our ALP was guided notes. The student focus group data showed that student participants felt that the guided notes were beneficial to them (See Table 9). Tonya stated that she used guided notes often when progressing through coursework. She stated that the guided notes allowed her to give full

attention to the class information, without having to capture notes. Tonya stated that she struggled with listening to videos while also trying to take notes. Several of the students agreed that guided notes relieved the pressure of trying to listen and read while taking notes.

Data collected from the student focus group and student perception interviews showed that students felt that the MTSS interventions used within our ALP were beneficial to them (See Table 13). Students found value in having the MTSS interventions and supports available to them when needed. The student participants cited three common outcomes as a result of being exposed to MTSS interventions. The students all agreed that being exposed to MTSS interventions allowed them to have an improved focus on their academics.

Julia, Kim and Tyler agreed that they had fewer behavior offenses, because of the smaller environment, and being able to speak with an adult to talk situations out (See Table 9). The student participants overwhelmingly agreed that the greatest benefit of the MTSS interventions was that they were able to complete more classes. All of the student participants spoke of their aspirations to graduate from high school. They all agreed that being able to earn more credits toward graduation the most valuable accomplishment, as a result of being exposed to MTSS interventions.

Staff Feelings on MTSS Interventions

Several of the staff participants stressed the importance of providing one-on-one support for students enrolled within our ALP. Fannie, one of the teacher assistants stated that she feels that students responded well to one-on-one support with academic support. One of the high school teachers, Victoria agreed and stated that students were eager to ask for help, and show greater effort when working with staff one-on-one. Violet stated that several students expressed

to her that they feel confident about school, because they knew that teachers are willing and available to support them individually (See Table 10).

The staff participants felt that providing guided notes for students is an effective intervention that is used to support students academically. Adam, a high school teacher stated that students often requested guided notes while working through their courses. He stated that many of the students rely on the guided notes, because it enables them to focus on retaining the content of their courses. Donnie stated that students seemed to be less stressed about having to capture key notes while also being exposed to new learning concepts. Mickey reminded the group that many the students enrolled in our program struggle with reading and writing. He agreed that the guided notes are a great tool that allows the students to be confident in learning new material while working to complete courses (See Table 10).

Parent Feelings on MTSS Interventions

The parent interview data showed that the parents felt that the MTSS interventions and supports provided by staff within our ALP greatly contributed to the academic success of their children (See Table 14). Tina stated that “her child has completed more work and passed more classes as a result of the supports provided to her while enrolled in our program. Baylor stated that her child has completed more classes while enrolled in our ALP, than when he was enrolled in his base school (See Table 11). All of the parent participants stated that they were satisfied with their child’s academic progress while enrolled in our ALP.

Results

This section will review the results of this study. An explanatory sequential mixed methods design was utilized to obtain quantitative and qualitative data for this study. Data was collected from staff, students and parents to obtain their thoughts and opinions about MTSS

interventions and supports utilized in our alternative learning program. Data was collected from staff through the MTSS Belief Survey and the staff focus group. Data was collected from students through the student perception interviews and student focus group. Data was also collected from parents through parent interviews. The data that was collected was reviewed to address the three research questions for this study.

Analysis of Research Questions

This section will review the analysis of each research question in this study. The analysis of research questions 1 and 2 in this study shows consistencies in data collected from staff, students and parents (See Figure 9). The analysis of research questions 1 and 2 show that Staff, students and parents shared similar views on the MTSS interventions provided by staff within our ALP. Figure 9 shows the frequency of qualitative data codes by each participant group. Figure 9 shows that staff, students and parents all felt that building trusting relationships, and providing one-on-one support empowered students to be successful despite the at-risk factors that can hinder academic progress (See Figure 9). The analysis of research question 3 asks how the implementation of the MTSS framework influence leadership skill development of the scholarly practitioner.

Analysis of Research Question # 1

The first research question that this study investigated was

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of staff members that are integrating MTSS interventions to at-risk students enrolled in the MNAS-ALP?

Data collected from the staff focus group showed that high school staff within our ALP felt that the MTSS interventions and supports provided to students enrolled in our ALP, are not just academically beneficial, but they are emotionally, socially and physically beneficial as well (See

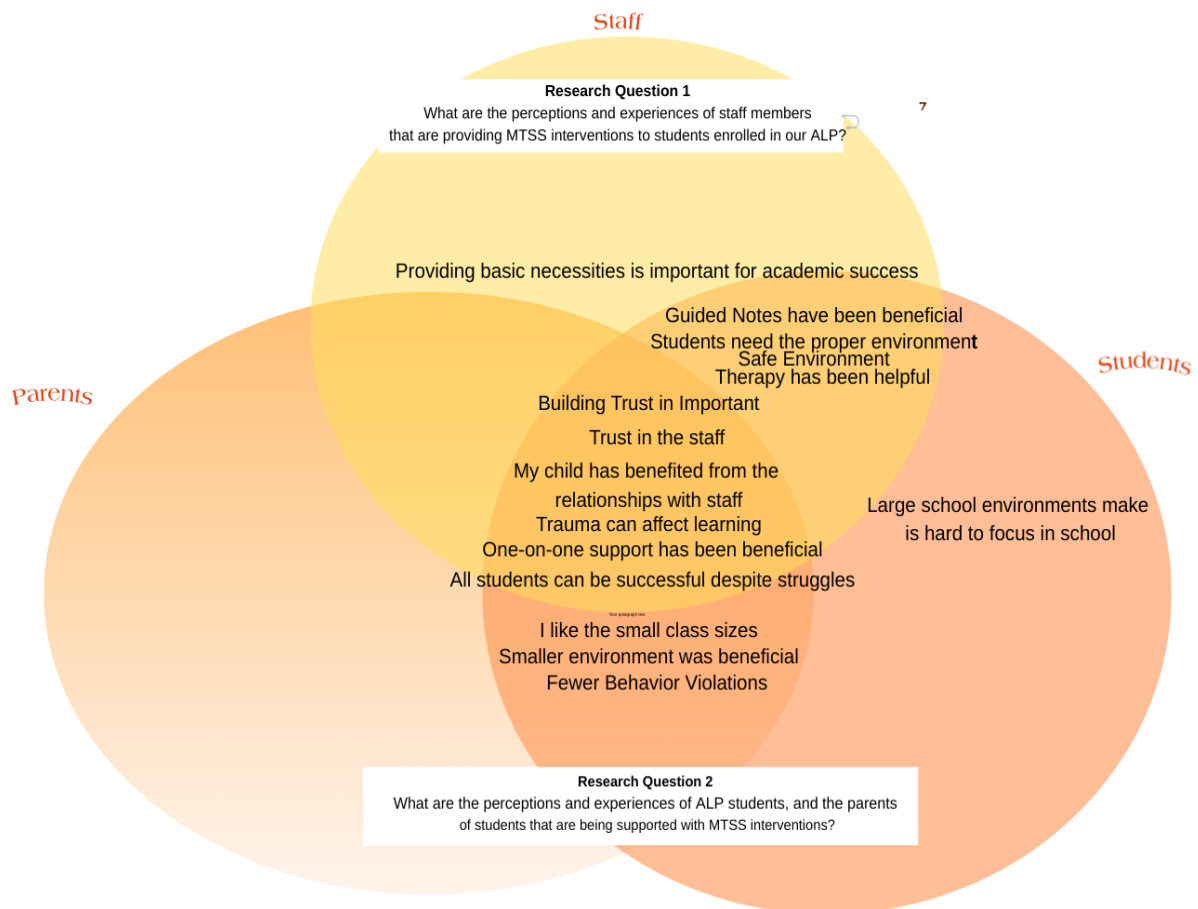


Figure 9 Comparison of Staff, Student and Parents code responses

Table 12). Staff members noted that creating the proper nurturing environment helped established trusting relationships with students. These relationships allowed the staff to develop trust with students enrolled within our ALP. Developing trusting relationships created an atmosphere that allowed staff to be more effective with addressing academic, social and emotional needs. Data from the staff focus group also showed that one-on-one supports within a smaller setting, allowed students to be academically successful (See table 10). One-on-one support within our ALP encompassed academic and therapeutic support from teachers and support staff. High school staff whole heartedly believe that all students can be successful, despite any struggles related to traumatic experiences or academic struggles.

Analysis of Research Question # 2

The second research question in this research study investigated was

2. What are the perceptions and experiences of ALP students, and the parents of students that are being supported with MTSS interventions?

Data collected from the student focus group showed that students enrolled in our ALP felt that they were provided with a smaller, nurturing environment that allowed them to be exposed to beneficial interventions and supports (See table 13). Student participants consistently noted that the smaller environment played a key role having access to teachers and support staff. Student participants also stated that one-on-one support from teachers and support staff provided access to sound academic and therapeutic interventions and supports (See table 10).

The parents of students enrolled in our ALP felt that the MTSS interventions and supports provided by our staff helped their children improve academically, mentally and socially (See Table 14). Data collected from Parent Perception Interviews showed that parents valued the smaller environment that our ALP provided. The parent participants also recognized that the

smaller nurturing environment allowed their children to be successful despite dealing with at-risk factors from traumatic experiences. The parents expressed gratitude that trusting relationships had been developed between students and ALP staff. The parent participants all concluded that they were pleased with their children's academic progress while enrolled in our ALP.

Analysis of Research Question # 3

The third research question in this study asks how the implementation of the MTSS framework influence leadership skill development of the scholarly practitioner. Weekly journals were written by me the scholarly practitioner during this study. Each phase of this study allowed me to reflect on the planned process and the actual results of each phase. Phase 1 presented an overwhelming amount of optimism about conducting this study. The driving motivation for me was the opportunity to conduct a study that could potentially enhance the process by which we support students academically within our alternative learning program. My optimism was also met with the question of how well the staff would respond to implementing the MTSS framework within our ALP. It was very uplifting to analyze the MTSS belief survey, to find that the majority of our staff felt that students could grow academically despite the at-risk factors that hinder learning. In reflection on this process, I am grateful for the willingness of the staff to be open minded about implementing the MTSS framework in the spirit of maximizing our effectiveness in how we support our students.

I was eager to get to phase 2 of my study so that I could begin my work with the student perception interviews. In my twenty-three-year career as an educator, I have learned that students are often honest and transparent when given the opportunity to share their feelings about school and learning. I thoroughly enjoyed meeting with the students to hear their thoughts on their learning and how best to support them. I could not wait to provide the data from the student

perception interviews with the staff members. I knew that we would be able to use this data gauge how well we were supporting the students with our interventions. I also realized that we could use this data to tailor any practices to better support students.

Phase 3 of my study allowed me to engage with staff, students and parents to obtain their thoughts and opinions on the MTSS framework interventions and supports that were used to support students within our ALP. This phase of the study was very enriching to me, because I was able to hear the aspects of all three groups participating in this study. The aspects of each group enabled me to make sound connections on how best to facilitate change as a leader.

The process of conducting this study has taught be the value of how to listen, support and serve effectively as a leader. This study has taught me that leadership is about being an effective listener. Listening to the staff's ideas and opinions about how best to support students has proved to be effective. Listening to student thoughts about their own learning as allowed us to measure how well we are supporting them. Listening to parents has allowed me to make connections with what the staff and students are saying about how well we support students. I feel that the staff, students and parents were all appreciative of the opportunity to be heard. This study has motivated me to begin each process to address future problems in education by seeking to give all involved the opportunity to give their thoughts on the issue.

Summary

Chapter 4 provided an overview of the mixed methods design that was used to analyze the experiences of staff, students and parents with MTSS interventions and supports utilized in our alternative learning program. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed to identify three findings. A review of the data analysis showed that staff, students and parents felt that our ALP provided a smaller nurturing environment that provided consistent access to

teachers and support staff. Data analysis also showed that staff, students and parents felt that the MTSS interventions and supports provided to students enrolled in our program are not just academically beneficial, but they are emotionally, socially and physically beneficial as well. Staff, students and parents felt that the MTSS interventions and supports provided in our ALP were effective in helping the students improve academically.

Chapter 5 includes an overview of the study, interpretations of the findings and any recommendations for future research on the implementation of the MTSS framework in alternative learning schools or programs. I will also share next steps based on the results of this study, and how this study has impacted my leadership.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to analyze the experiences of staff, students and parents on MTSS interventions provided to students enrolled in our alternative learning program. This study was a mixed method sequential design that collected quantitative and qualitative data.

This study was conducted in three phases. In Phase one, staff members were provided with professional development on the MTSS framework. Staff members were trained in the framework and how to apply various tiered interventions for students that were not making academic progress. The staff was also trained on how at-risk factors can lead to students falling behind academically. Phase one of this study allowed me to administer the MTSS Belief Survey to ALP staff in the initial implementation of MTSS within our alternative program. The staff then worked with the administration team to develop a framework for exposing students to Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions.

Phase two of this study began with the staff putting the tiered interventions into practice for students enrolled in our ALP. I was also able to conduct student perception interviews with the students to obtain their thoughts and feelings about their abilities and support needs. Phase two of this study also allowed the staff to begin to meet with students to monitor student academic progress, and prescribe supports and interventions based on the meeting data. Phase three of this study allowed me to conduct focus groups with the staff and the students to obtain their thoughts and opinions on the MTSS framework interventions and supports used within our ALP. I conducted parent interviews with parents to obtain their thoughts and opinions on the MTSS framework interventions and supports utilized to support their children within our ALP.

Data was analyzed for this study using inductive coding. Data collected for this study was also analyzed by the following three guiding research questions.

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of staff members that are integrating MTSS interventions to at-risk students enrolled in the MNAS-ALP?
2. What are the perceptions and experiences of MNAS-ALP students, and the parents of ALP students that are being supported with MTSS interventions?
3. How does implementation of the MTSS framework influence the leadership skill development of the scholarly practitioner?

Research question 1 sought to obtain the perceptions and experiences of the staff providing MTSS interventions to high school students enrolled in our ALP. The staff members that provided MTSS interventions and supports to students within our ALP consist of teachers, teacher assistants, school counselors, a school social worker, a school nurse and a school therapist. The instructional coach and the administrator of our program also worked to support the MTSS implementation within our ALP. Data from research question 1 was obtained through a focus group conducted with the ALP staff.

Research question 2 sought to obtain the perceptions and experiences of students that received MTSS interventions and supports while attending our ALP. Furthermore, the aim of research question 2 was to also obtain the perceptions and experiences of parents of the students that received the MTSS interventions and supports while enrolled in our ALP. Data from research question 2 was obtained through a focus group and interviews conducted with the students and parents. Research question 3 sought to gauge the influence of leadership skill development of the scholarly practitioner. Data from weekly journals were used to gauge the influence of the MTSS framework implementation on my leadership skill development.

There were 3 findings that were developed from the data collected in this study. The first finding is: The data from this study shows that staff, students and parents felt that the MTSS

interventions and supports provided therapy for trauma. The second finding is: The data from this study shows that staff, students and parents felt that the MTSS interventions and supports provided a supporting learning environment. The third finding is: staff, students and parents also felt that the MTSS interventions were effective in helping students be academically successful. The data from these findings show that staff, students and parents felt that the MTSS interventions and supports provided in our ALP helped their children academically, mentally, and socially.

The research questions that were developed for this study guided me in collecting data that would help gauge the thoughts and experiences of staff, students and parents. Data collected from the focus groups, interviews and surveys were used to develop findings. These findings were then used to analyze the responses of staff, students and parents. The findings of the data collected was then analyzed to answer each research questions in this study.

Summary of the Findings

Participants in this study were allowed to express themselves in various ways. The staff members had the opportunity to complete the MTSS Belief Survey that gauges the overall of feeling of staff member's belief that all students can learn despite academic struggles. The vast majority of the staff expressed that they believe that all students can learn despite academic struggles. This data plays a huge part in the implementation of the MTSS framework within a school or program. Staff members must believe that all students can learn, in order to believe in the interventions and support being used to help students learn.

The staff members were able to participate in the focus group to obtain data on their thoughts and experiences in providing MTSS interventions to students enrolled in our ALP. Table 12 of this study shows a correlation between research question 1, the staff focus group,

qualitative data codes and findings (See Table 12). The staff members expressed that the MTSS interventions provided by various staff members was key in supporting students in achieving academic success. The staff members all agreed that the factors that cause students to be considered at-risk must first be addressed by the support staff before actual learning can take place. It was the overall belief by the staff that the students were receptive and appreciated the supports and interventions being provided to them. The staff members concluded the focus groups by saying that students who are considered at risk, must be supported with their mental health and physical health while also being supported academically (See Table 12).

Students were also given the opportunity to express themselves in individual perception interviews. These perception interviews allowed the students to express their thoughts about their own academic strengths and weaknesses, and how best they can be supported by staff. All of the students expressed a weakness related to a particular subject area like math or English. However, the students also provided details on the factors that cause them to fall behind academically. For some of the students, mental health and high anxiety caused them to avoid school. The students stated that they would either accumulate excessive absences, or not put effort into completing work. For other students, they expressed that their issue was repeated discipline violations. These violations caused them to miss school and eventually be referred to our ALP. All of the Students expressed that they liked the smaller setting, and they valued the sincere care of the staff for their well-being.

The students were asked to also participate in a focus group after being exposed to MTSS interventions and supports. Table 13 of this study shows a correlation between research question 2, the student focus group, qualitative data codes and findings (See Table 13). The student participants initially provided information on their academic struggles and which factors led to

Table 12

Linking Research Question 1 to Staff Data, Qualitative Data Codes and Finding.

Research Question 1	Data Source	Codes	Finding
What are the perceptions and experiences of staff members that are providing MTSS interventions to students enrolled in our ALP?	Focus Group with ALP Staff	- Proper Environment - Building Trust - Trauma Leads to Struggles - All Students Can Learn - Therapy is Vital - Providing the Basic Necessities is Important - Guided Notes have Benefited our students - Students Respond Well the One-on-One Support.	Staff members feel that the MTSS interventions and supports provided to students enrolled in our ALP, are not just academically beneficial, but they are emotionally, socially and physically beneficial as well.

Table 13

Linking Research Question 2 to Student Data, Qualitative Data Codes and Findings

Research Question 2	Data Source	Codes	Findings
What are the perceptions and experiences of ALP students, and the parents of students that are being supported with MTSS interventions?	Focus Group with ALP Students	- Smaller class sizes - Access to teachers and support staff is a big help - Large school environments lead to increased anxiety/behaviors - Trauma/Bad Experiences make is hard to focus on school. - Trust in the staff - Care and support of staff is encouraging - I feel comfortable communicating with staff - One-on-one support is helpful - Available guided notes help me retain information - Therapy is helpful - Improved focus on academics - Fewer behavior offenses - More credits	Students feel that the MTSS Framework provided within our ALP provides students with an environment that gives academic and emotional supports through consistent access to teachers and support staff.

these struggles. The students stated that the larger student numbers at their base schools led to increased anxiety and conflict with other students. These two factors often led them to avoid school or get into fights as a result.

The students also expressed that they had some bad experiences that led to their inability to properly focus in school. The students also stated that they valued the smaller setting that our ALP provided. Access to staff for one-on-one help was something that all the students appreciated. The students expressed that the one-on-one help provided them with the opportunity to get academic support, and therapeutic support for personal and school related struggles. The biggest reason that the group gave as to why they valued the support from staff, was they knew that the staff genuinely cared about their well-being. The students as a group felt that the MTSS interventions helped them have an improved focus on their academics (See Table 13). The students stated that they had fewer discipline offenses and have completed more classes as a result of the supports and interventions provided to them by the ALP staff.

The parent participants in this study were also given the opportunity to participate in individual interviews with me. Table 14 of this study shows a correlation between research question 2, the parent interviews, qualitative data codes and findings (See Table 14). In the interviews the parent participants provided the reason their child was enrolled in our ALP. These reasons ranged from constant discipline issues and being referred by the school, to the parents opting to self-enroll their child to avoid academic or behaviors issues. Several of the parents also stated that their child had experienced some tough situations that resulted in them struggling in school. Each parent felt that our ALP provided a great environment for their child to focus on their academics while getting support in other needed areas linked to misbehavior and struggles with their mental health (See Table 14). Each parent expressed that they were satisfied with the

Table 14

Linking Research Question 2 to Parent Data, Qualitative Data Codes and Finding

Research Question 2	Data Source or Instrument	Codes	Finding
What are the perceptions and experiences of ALP students, and the parents of students that are being supported with MTSS interventions?	Parent Perception Interviews	• My child has experienced some tough situations (Trauma) • My child has completed more work and passed more classes. • I feel that the smaller environment has helped my child • I am satisfied with my child's progress • My child is completing more work and passing more classes. • I feel that my child likes having someone at school they can talk to • My child is having fewer behaviors • My child has benefited from the relationships built with the staff.	• Parents feel that the MTSS interventions and supports provided by the staff within our ALP has helped their children improve academically, mentally and socially

support their child received while enrolled in our ALP. The parents noted that they have seen an improvement in their behavior at school and at home. For many of the parents, they stated that they believed that the MTSS interventions and supports have helped their child complete more classes.

A comparison of responses from staff, students and parents provides data that supports a common theme (See figure 9). Each participant group stressed the importance of building relationships and trust. The staff members highlighted that a strong relationship must be established before one can effectively teach a student that has struggled due to at-risk factors. The students expressed how they valued the relationships that were developed through one-on-one work with staff members. The parents all stated that their child's success was attributed to the relationships developed with the various staff members within our alternative learning program.

These established relationships paved the way for the development of trust between staff and students. For students that are struggling with the effects of at-risk factors, trust is a very important thing. It is hard for them to trust anyone, when they have repeatedly experienced disappointment or have been let down in the past. The development of student trust then leads to the development of trust with our ALP staff and parents. As a result of the trust bond from all groups, communication is improved, and staff can really implement effective interventions and supports as a result. The process of developing trust does not happen overnight. It can take time, but when trust is developed, we see a shift in student academic production.

The development of trust and communication is the result of students' feeling that our ALP staff members truly care about their well-being. The trust that is developed between all participant groups was not developed based on conversations, but they are the result of consistent

actions from ALP staff members. Students come to have full trust in ALP staff only through consistent action that promotes a caring and nurturing environment. A caring learning environment is what we strive for at MDNAS-ALP. Students and parents consistently expressed that the sincere care for the students enrolled in our ALP is what they appreciated most. The common theme for success of students enrolled in our ALP is that they are immersed into a caring and nurturing environment. This is the basis for established trust, which then leads to the staff being able to identify how the at-risk factors have affected our students. This data then allows our ALP staff to effectively apply MTSS interventions and supports to assist students in being successful academically.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings of this study on analyzing the thoughts and experiences of MTSS interventions and supports are directly related to previous research studies discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 2 of this study highlights at-risk factors that can lead to students being at risk of not succeeding in school. Many of these at-risk factors can be linked to the factors that the students enrolled in our ALP have experienced. Some of these factors include traumatic experiences, struggles with mental health and repeated discipline offenses. Chapter 2 of this study also makes a correlation between at-risk factors and academic struggles. As a result of these at-risk factors, students tend to avoid school or accumulate excessive absences. These excessive absences lead to students missing instruction on key curriculum and concepts (Sosu et al., 2021). As a result, these students fall behind academically.

There is a correlation between the characteristics of at-risk students researched in chapter 2, and the at-risk students that participated in this study. Chapter 2 of this study establishes the definition of what an at-risk student is. An at-risk student is a student who is at-risk of not

meeting academic or social expectations (Lu et al., 2021). When high school students enroll in our ALP, they are considered at-risk due to them being behind in earning credit towards graduation. Many of these students have not earned credit due to several factors that have affected their school performance.

Chapter 2 also identified the at-risk factors that cause students to not be successful in school. Poor academic performance can be the result of high absenteeism, repeated discipline offenses and negative effects of traumatic experiences (Casazza, 2021). The students that participated in this study struggled with school as a result of one or several of these factors. Prior to their enrollment in our ALP, these students had documented struggles with repeated discipline offenses, high absenteeism and exhibited effects from traumatic experiences. The student focus group data identified the student participants' own feelings about their various struggles with discipline, anxiety, and high absences (See Table 9). Student participants were able to make their own correlations between their at-risk factors and how these factors led to them struggling with school.

Chapter 2 of this study also provides information on the MTSS framework, and how researched based interventions are used to support students that struggle academically. Research shows that there is an increased need for alternative learning programs to serve students that are considered "at-risk" (Dameron et al, 2019). Chapter 2 of this study makes a direct correlation to how the MTSS framework interventions and supports can be used to support students in achieving academic success. The data obtained in this study from the staff, students and parents can be directly tied to the concepts discussed in Chapter 2 of this study.

Summary of Research Question 1 Findings

Research question 1 in this study asks: What are the perceptions and experiences of staff members that are integrating MTSS interventions to at-risk students enrolled in the MNAS-ALP? The data from this study shows that staff, students and parents felt that the MTSS interventions and supports provided therapy for trauma. Chapter 2 of this study provides information on the researched based MTSS interventions that are used to support at-risk students with dealing with the effects of Trauma. Staff responses in the focus group that was conducted for this study align with the research that was conducted in Chapter 2 of this study.

Chapter 2 of this study provides research on the MTSS Tiered interventions that can be effectively used within an alternative learning school or program. According to research conducted in chapter 2, social emotional learning programs, School based therapy and trauma informed practices are just as vital as providing academic instruction to students enrolled in an ALP. This is due to the fact that at-risk factors like trauma, mental health struggles and excessive absences can lead to students developing academic gaps (Casazza, 2021).

The staff members provided valuable information in the focus group that enabled me to effectively answer research question 1. The staff members that participated in the focus group all felt that our students greatly benefited from the interventions of school-based therapy. Our school-based therapist, Kimberly stated that students often verbalized that they looked forward to their therapy sessions with her. Violet the school counselor agreed, by stating that the students would often ask her if Kimberly was on campus, and would make a request to see her. The staff unanimously agreed that being trained as a trauma informed staff was a great benefit to them. Fannie the teacher assistant stated that understanding the student's mental and emotional

struggles and triggers allowed the staff to better support the students emotionally and academically.

Chapter 2 of this study also provided research on researched based Tier 2 interventions that are commonly used within an ALP. The interventions that were highlighted in Chapter 2 were one-on-one support, smaller learning environment and flexible learning times. Chapter 2 identifies that one-on-one support should be provided when students do not respond well to Tier 1 instruction. One-on-one support could be provided to students from teachers, counselors or therapists for academic or mental struggles. The staff participants provided great feedback on these interventions during the focus group. Several of the staff stated that the students responded well to one-on-one support. Mickey, a school counselor stated that he feels that the “students feel secure when they are working with staff one-on-one.” He also stated that “this sense of security happens when the student has developed trust in the staff.” Several of the staff agreed that trust was the biggest hurdle to supporting students. The staff felt that the students served in our ALP responded well to interventions, because they trusted the staff, when many of them struggle to trust anyone, due to traumatic experiences.

Chapter 2 also identifies that a smaller learning environment is an effective intervention for students that are struggling in school (Asim et al., 2020). Mitch, the program administrator stated that the smaller environment that is provided for the students enrolled in our ALP, is a great benefit to the students. Mitch stated that the smaller numbers may lessen any mental health triggers, while also making the students feel more secure. The consensus of the staff participants was that the smaller learning environment lessened student conflict and supported the students in being more engaged in learning. The staff also agreed that offering flexible learning times was a great benefit to students enrolled in our ALP. Adam, a high school teacher stated that many

students struggle even in smaller settings, and allowing students to come to school for shorter time spans, helps them be successful with completing work.

Research in Chapter 2 shows that providing flexible learning times can be a beneficial intervention to students enrolled in Alternative Learning Programs. Chapter 2 states that many ALPs provide afterschool or twilight times to students that need a different schedule for learning (Meachem, 2021). Our ALP provides students with the opportunity to attend in the afternoons and virtually to fit their various needs and situations. These flexible learning times have proven to be beneficial to students and they deal with circumstances that oftentimes affects their ability to attend school during the traditional hours.

Chapter 2 provides research on MTSS Tier three interventions that are used in alternative learning programs. The tier 3 interventions that were highlighted in chapter 2 of this study were progress monitoring, collaborating with health care providers and the MTSS Problem Solving Team. Chapter 2 states that the practice of progress monitoring allows staff to track the progress of students to gauge the effectiveness of interventions and supports. Faith, the instructional coach, stated that monitoring students' progress through the one-on-one meetings, PLT meetings and biweekly tier meetings, was an effective way of measuring student progress within our program. Victoria, a high school teacher stated that the weekly one-on-one meetings allowed her to not just learn about how to support students academically, but she learned about how to support them emotionally. Collaborating with health care providers allows the school health personnel to work with providers to support students with care plans, securing appointments and medication. Tonya, the school nurse stated that the support she has provided to students with health care plans is vital to helping them be successful academically.

Research from chapter 2 states that the problem-solving team is a vital component of the MTSS framework. The problem-solving team serves to provide intensive services for students that are identified to receive Tier 3 supports and interventions as a result of students not responding well to tier 2 interventions (Murdoch, 2024). The problem-solving team consists of a diverse group of staff members that are trained in specific subject areas or disciplines. In our ALP our problem-solving team consisted of the administration team, school counselors, social worker, school nurse, and our instructional coach. This team met to review one-on-one and PLT meeting data to progress monitor students. Many of the Tier 3 interventions provided to students were assigned during our ALP tier meetings. These interventions are intended to provide intense support for those students that have not responded well to tier 1 and tier 2 interventions.

The data that was collected from the staff focus group correlates to the researched based interventions that are provided in chapter 2 of this study. The findings that were developed from this study shows that staff members feel that the MTSS framework interventions and supports provided to students enrolled in our program are not just academically beneficial, but they are emotionally, socially and physically beneficial as well. Chapter 2 of this study consistently suggests that at-risk students need “wrap around” support to address at risk factors related to trauma. These supports must be provided in tandem with academic support for key instructional concepts. Research from chapter 2 states that the MTSS framework was implemented to improve the academic and behavioral support that schools provide at-risk students (Wakerle-Holloman et al., 2021). The first finding of this study, based on staff responses and chapter 2 of this study, both state that students enrolled in an alternative learning program must be supported emotionally, socially and academically to ensure success for at-risk students.

Summary of Research Question 2 Findings

Research question 2 in this study asks: What are the perceptions and experiences of MNAS-ALP students, and the parents of ALP students that are being supported with MTSS interventions? The data from this study shows that staff, students and parents felt that the MTSS interventions and supports provided a supporting learning environment. Students and parents also felt that the MTSS interventions were effective in helping students be academically successful. Students enrolled in our ALP felt that they were provided with a smaller, nurturing environment that provided consistent access to teachers and support staff.

Chapter 2 of this study provided research that shows that smaller learning environments can be an effective intervention for at-risk students enrolled in an alternative learning program.

Research shows that smaller learning environments benefit at-risk students, because support staff like counselors, therapists and social workers can provide targeted support for students (Fernandez et al., 2021).

The student participants in this study provided feedback in the focus group that supports the second finding in this study. Several of the students stated that they like the smaller environment that our ALP provides. Tonya and Jasmine both stated that the large numbers of people attending their base schools led to their struggles with behavior and attendance. Other students stated that they like the smaller environment, because it gives them access to staff for support with their academics and other areas like therapy. Research from chapter 2 of this study supports the data collected from the student focus group in that the student participants expressed that they feel that our ALP provides a smaller more nurturing environment.

Students and parents also felt that the MTSS interventions were effective in helping students be academically successful. Data from this study shows that students found value in

having the MTSS interventions and supports available to them when needed. Chapter 2 of this study identified the researched based MTSS interventions than are commonly used in alternative learning programs. Student responses in the student focus group align with the research conducted in chapter 2 of this study. Chapter 2 of this study provides research that states that schools and programs should seek to implement an MTSS framework that addresses gaps caused by the need for support with academics, behavior and emotional support (NCDPI, 2023) (see Figure 2). MTSS interventions that can be used within and alternative learning program consists of tiered supports like Social Emotional Learning and Progress Monitoring. One-on-one support is also used to support students academically, mentally and physically with staff such as teachers, therapists and school nurses.

The students that were enrolled in our ALP, that also participated in this study acknowledged their need for support with discipline, mental health and academics. Over 50 percent of the students that participated in this study were referred to our ALP as a result of repeated discipline offenses (See Table 5). Several of the students expressed struggles with anxiety or mental health during the focus group. Data from the focus group shows that students openly acknowledge their struggles, and find that the interventions and supports provided to them within our ALP were vital to their success.

During the focus group, students spoke about how each intervention supported them in an area that they struggled in. Kim and Julia spoke about how they often got into trouble at their base schools. Both students expressed that the smaller setting minimized the issues they were having with discipline offenses. They also spoke about how being able to have staff available to provide support to them allowed them not be reactive when adverse situations arise at school and home. Tonya and Jasmine spoke about their struggles with anxiety and mental health. Each of

them expressed that the large numbers of students attending their base schools would often trigger their anxiety and lead to panic attacks. Tonya and Jasmine also stated that they avoided school as a result, and accumulated a high number of absences. Each student agreed that the smaller setting of our ALP was one of the biggest benefits of attending. They expressed that they look forward to attending school, and that their grades have also improved.

All of the students that participated in the focus group expressed that the one-on-one support provided by the various staff members was a great benefit to them. Kim stated that she did not always need the one-on-one academic support from her teachers, but felt that it was reassuring to know that she could easily be supported whenever she needed it. Tom stated that the one-on-one support from his teacher was beneficial to him for goal setting. He stated that his teacher was able to help him map out a plan for completing his final coursework for graduation. Tonya and Bonnie stated that they used one-on-one support frequently for academic support. They both agreed that it helped them to understand various concepts that they struggled to understand while working independently.

All of the student participants expressed that they get therapeutic services in several ways from various staff members. Tonya stated that she often would meet with Fannie or Violet when she needed to speak with a staff member about any struggles she was having. Kendrick stated that Adam was the staff member that he often talked to when he needed support. Kim expressed that Victoria was the staff member that she utilized the most. All of the students expressed that the interventions that were available was a huge part of their success while enrolled in our program. One measure of success for the student participants was that they were able to earn credit towards graduation, when they struggled to complete classes while attending their base schools. The thoughts and opinions of the students during the focus group showed that they made

a direct correlation between their academic success and the MTSS interventions that were provided to them.

Parents felt that the MTSS interventions and supports provided in our ALP helped their children academically, mentally, and socially. Chapter 2 of this study provides research on school and community factors that have led to the lack of academic progress in school for many students. One major community factor that has affected the vast number of students is Adverse Childhood Experiences. Chapter 2 provides research that states that many students have experienced traumatic experiences that cause students to struggle in school (Reidy et al., 2021). Chapter 2 also highlights research that states that students are considered to have high Adverse Childhood Experiences Scores (ACES) based on the various trauma experiences.

Many of the students that attend our ALP have high ACE scores due to a traumatic experience. Several of the parent participants in this study expressed that their child's lack of academic success was the result at-risk factors caused by a traumatic experience. Traumatic experiences can lead to students struggling with mental health, and behavior. As a result, students fall behind in school and there is a lack of academic progress (Vu et al., 2022). The MTSS framework is designed to support students with any mental and physical struggles that can hinder student academic progress (Wakerle-Holloman et al., 2021).

The data collected from the parent participant interviews shows that parents felt that the MTSS interventions and supports provided to their children, supported them mentally, academically and socially. Kim's parent, Valerie stated that Kim's behavior has greatly improved while enrolled in our ALP. Valerie stated that the smaller setting and one-on-one access to staff have helped Kim improve her behavior. Tom's parent Brianna stated that the relationships developed through the one-on-one support have helped Tom be more engaged in

completing coursework. Tonya's parent Lucy, expressed that the one-on-one access has helped Lucy deal with her mental and academic struggles. Tina, Jasmine's parent, stated that her anxiety was a major cause of her excessive absences and lack of academic progress in school. Tina stated that the interventions that Jasmine was exposed to within our ALP have helped her improve her attendance and complete courses despite the challenges presented by her struggles with anxiety. All of the parent participants expressed that they were pleased with their child's academic progress while enrolled in our ALP. Each parent was able to express thanks and appreciation for the support their child received while enrolled in our ALP.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was the MTSS Framework. The MTSS framework utilizes evidence-based practices to improve the process by which students are provided with behavioral and academic support (Freeman et al., 2015). The intended goal of the MTSS Framework is to address academic gaps caused by mental, physical and academic struggles. The results of this study are directly tied to the MTSS Framework interventions that were used to support students that were enrolled in our ALP.

Staff members that served in our ALP were very influential in the development of the MTSS interventions, while also working to ensure these interventions were provided with fidelity. The theme that was driven from the staff focus group aligns with the intent of the theoretical framework of MTSS. The data showed that the staff felt that the MTSS interventions utilized within our ALP provided emotional, physical and academic support for our students. The student participants in this study were also vital in obtaining sound results. Student focus group data stated that students valued the smaller environment, as well as the MTSS interventions provided to them by our ALP staff members.

Obtaining the thoughts and opinions of parents for this study was a key piece of data, that allowed me to make connections with the effectiveness of the interventions through the eyes of our parents. This data was very helpful, because our parents were able to give their perspective from an outside vantage point, considering that they are not in school to witness the interventions taking place. Data from the parent interviews showed that parents felt that the MTSS interventions provided by our ALP staff supported their children academically, mentally, and socially. The results of all data collected from the staff, students and parents tie back to the intent of MTSS Framework. The MTSS Framework's aim is to support students in any area of struggle that leads to the lack of academic progress. The data results discussed in this study show that student needs were met mentally, physically, emotionally and academically.

Limitations of the Study

Although I was able to collect appropriate data to analyze and provide responses to the research questions, limitations of the study may be identified. Students are referred to our ALP throughout the school year. Student enrollments can happen at the beginning, middle or close to the end of the school year. Students also have the option to transition back to their base schools after the fall semester. As a result, one limitation that exists, is that the ALP staff may not have consistent access to students to provide sustained exposure to MTSS interventions.

Our ALP also has a transient population of students that often move or relocate to other school districts. Students often reside in residential group homes and foster care homes. These students are frequently moved around due to the lack of space in the group homes or the lack foster care providers in our area. This also can be a limitation that limits long-term exposure to MTSS interventions and supports.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

Researchers must continue to examine ways to ensure that all students are receiving the support they need to be successful in school. The MTSS Framework is a statewide program that is intended to be utilized for all students in every school district (Wilson, 2023). There is a consistent focus on standardized test data, and oftentimes academic growth is measured by this testing data. As a result, schools miss the overall intent of the MTSS Framework. Instruction is the one word that is associated with MTSS. When students enroll into our ALP, the vast majority of them are academically behind. They are academically behind as a result of the at-risk factors that cause them to struggle in school. Schools often seek to address the academic gaps without addressing the mental, physical or emotional struggles. This often leads to frustrated school staff and frustrated students. These frustrated students are the ones that are often referred to our ALP.

Implementing the MTSS Framework within our ALP has taught us that we must address student academic gaps while also addressing the at-risk factors that have caused the gaps. We have also found that we can only work on the at-risk factors, because the severity of the factors will not allow the students to effectively engage in learning. The effects of severe trauma are so great that we have to get the students to a certain baseline with therapy, mental health support and trust before they can make progress academically.

Traditional schools and alternative programs must work together to establish practical goals, and to apply practical interventions to support students in obtaining school success. Many believe that students that attend our ALP are a lost cause due to their behavior or their lack of academic progress. This study shows that the vast majority of at-risk students can be successful when exposed to the right environment along with targeted tiered interventions. There must also be sincere effort placed into involving the staff, students and parents into the process of

supporting at-risk students. The goal should be to get them involved to hear what they have to say rather than to tell them about the struggles they are having. This study shows that when staff, students and parents are given a chance to be heard, meaningful data can be obtained on how best to support students in school.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study was conducted with the high school staff and students within our ALP. There are similar studies that could be conducted in the future. One study that could be conducted within the ALP is a similar study with the Middle school staff and students. Many of our high school students have struggled with school from an early age. Collecting data from middle school students, staff members and parents could result in improved school performance at an earlier age.

Similar studies could be conducted within the base schools with high school and middle school students. A small number of students staff and parents could participate in the study, and this would allow the base school staff to learn how to effectively support the emotional, mental, physical and academic needs of their students. This study would give the base school administrators a model of how to involve staff, students and parents to enact a positive change in the lives of their at-risk students.

Implications on Role as Scholarly Practitioner

Research Question 3 of this study asks: How does implementation of the MTSS framework influence the leadership skill development of the scholarly practitioner? I have been the coordinator of Alternative Learning for 3 years, and the past three years have really shifted my approach as a leader. The first and most important implication developed as a scholarly practitioner in this study, is the importance of effective leadership. As a leader who has

facilitated the implementation of the MTSS framework, I have learned that the MTSS framework is only as effective as the staff that is providing the interventions. I have learned that there must be total “buy in” from the staff of any school or program that seeks to implement the MTSS Framework. Staff members must firmly believe that all students can learn regardless of their ability or academic struggles.

I have learned that the staff Belief Survey results are the most important pieces of data for leaders to use to gauge the level of belief a staff has in their students. I firmly believe that leaders are charged with cultivating an environment that promotes the belief that all students can learn and grow academically regardless of their ability or academic struggles. Leaders can effectively do this by educating their staff members on the MTSS framework. Leaders are also responsible for supporting staff in learning how to properly monitor students and develop interventions to support students based on data collected during monitoring.

As the scholarly practitioner, I have learned that remaining flexible and keeping an open mind allows leaders to empower their staff members to try new interventions and supports to help students. My experience as a veteran educator has taught me that all students are different in how they learn and what supports they need to be successful. Having an open mind as a leader sets the example for staff members to apply this same kind of thinking to ensure that students are exposed to the most effective interventions to support their learning. Close-minded negative thinking counteracts innovative ideas. Innovative ideas are what spawn unique effective practices that can support students in being academically successful.

Oftentimes as school leaders, we only involve staff members in the process to support students, as we are seen as experts in our field. However, this study has taught me the power of taking the time to listen to all stakeholders to get the full picture of how best to serve students.

As the Coordinator of Alternative Learning for my school district. I work directly with the staff, students and parents within our alternative learning program. This study has provided me with meaningful insight on how to facilitate maximized support for the students enrolled within our ALP by working with our staff members, our students and their parents. Students and parents expressed an overwhelming appreciation for the opportunity to be heard. I thanked them for their participation in the study, and they thanked me for giving them the opportunity to be heard. For many of these parents and students, no one has taken the time to listen to their thoughts, opinions or concerns. I will use the data from this study to support our ALP and the base schools as students transition into our ALP and back to their base schools.

I believe that the data collected during this study is very powerful in that it allowed me to hear from staff, students and parents. It is my recommendation that the results of this study are shared initially with the ALP staff. Providing these results to the ALP staff will allow us to measure the effectiveness of the MTSS interventions and supports provided to students within our ALP. The data from this study could show us how best to support future students within our ALP.

It is also my recommendation that these results be shared with building administrators. I believe that this data would allow the base school building principals to see the power of involving staff, students and parents in the process of MTSS support. I feel that the students and parents would value the opportunity to speak about their struggles and how best to support them. The results of this study should also be shared with our Student Services Department. I believe that the data could prove to be effective in supporting educators with applying resiliency practices within their schools and classrooms.

This study has allowed me to reflect on the systematic processes that we have been able to implement that have greatly benefited our students. One practice that has been a great benefit is the practice of allowing parent request. Parents have the ability to request that their child enroll within our ALP. Many of the parents and students choose to enroll with us as a result of the caring environment that they have previously experienced or heard about from other families.

Another practice that we have implemented is the practice of recognizing a student from each classroom as the Student of the Week. These students are chosen by the teachers that serve them within their classroom. The administrators go to each classroom to present these students with a certificate. The Students of the Week are chosen for exhibiting great effort with their behavior and academics.

One particular student that was chosen as the Student of the Week, took the time to express to me that receiving the Student of the Week award, was the first time that she had been recognized for anything positive in school. She stated that the recognition encouraged her to continue to work hard with her school work. She also stated that the recognition showed her that her teachers truly cared about her. This is just one example of how impactful our ALP has been on the success of students enrolled within our ALP. As a leader, conducting this study, has encouraged me to continue to facilitate the process of creating a caring environment within our ALP by continuing to give our staff, students and parents a listening ear. I am certain that this practice will continue to foster trust, encouragement and the continued care for the students within our ALP. This study has shown that trust, encouragement and the care of our students will only increase the opportunities for student success.

Conclusions

The high school students enrolled in our ALP earned over 500 credits toward graduation for the 2024-2025 school year. There were 30 high school seniors that graduated from our ALP for the 2024-2025 school year. This was the largest graduating class in our ALP's history. These two pieces of data speak to the academic success of the high school students enrolled in our program. However, this study allowed me to take a deeper look into the data provided by our staff, students and parents. This data speaks to more than just classes and grades. This data speaks to trust, transparency, and relationship building.

Taking the time to listen to our staff, students and parents provided our staff with vital information on how best to address the at-risk factors that hindered our students from being academically successful. We learned that we must address the “whole child” in order to effectively reach students that struggle in school. It is my hope that we can use the data from this study to positively affect future generations of at-risk students that enroll in our alternative learning program.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board

Willis Building · Mail Stop 682

600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834

Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 · rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: [Janarde Cannon](#)

CC: [Lawrence Hodgkins](#)

Date: 1/14/2025

Re: [UMCIRB 24-002159](#)

Analyzing the Experiences of Staff, students and parents on the effects of MTSS Framework interventions and supports for Students Enrolled in an Alternative Learning Program

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) occurred on 1/14/2025. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category # 6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

As the Principal Investigator you are explicitly responsible for the conduct of all aspects of this study and must adhere to all reporting requirements for the study. Your responsibilities include but are not limited to:

1. Ensuring changes to the approved research (including the UMCIRB approved consent document) are initiated only after UMCIRB review and approval except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All changes (e.g. a change in procedure, number of participants, personnel, study locations, new recruitment materials, study instruments, etc.) must be prospectively reviewed and approved by the UMCIRB before they are implemented;
2. Where informed consent has not been waived by the UMCIRB, ensuring that only valid versions of the UMCIRB approved, date-stamped informed consent document(s) are used for obtaining informed consent (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the ePIRATE study workspace);

3. Promptly reporting to the UMCIRB all unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others;

4. Submission of a final report application to the UMCIRB prior to the expected end date provided in the IRB application in order to document human research activity has ended and to provide a timepoint in which to base document retention; and

5. Submission of an amendment to extend the expected end date if the study is not expected to be completed by that date. The amendment should be submitted 30 days prior to the UMCIRB approved expected end date or as soon as the Investigator is aware that the study will not be completed by that date.

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
MTSS Belief Survey	Surveys and Questionnaires
Parent Interview Questions	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Parental Permission and Parent Consent to Participate	Consent Forms
Proposal Defense	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Staff and Student Focus Group Questions	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Staff Consent to Participate Form	Consent Forms
Student Assent Form	Consent Forms
Student Perception Interview	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Student Perception Interview	Surveys and Questionnaires

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(I)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

Appendix B: Staff Consent to Participate Form

Staff Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: Analyzing the Experiences of Staff, Students and Parents on the Effects of MTSS Interventions and Supports for Students Enrolled in an Alternative Learning Program

Principal Investigator: Janarde Cannon

Institution, Department or Division: Department of Educational Leadership, College of Education, East Carolina University

Address: 1019 Fleming Street Greenville NC, 27834

Telephone #: 252-327-8121

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this research is to analyze the experience of teachers as they provide MTSS interventions in an alternative learning program. This study will focus on the implementation of MTSS for high school students in our alternative learning program. The driving data for this research will be collect the thoughts and opinion of staff members that are providing the MTSS interventions and supports. You are being invited to take part in this research because you work directly with high school students in our alternative learning program to provide supports. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn how best to serve students while enrolled in our program.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about 6 people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

I understand I should not volunteer for this study if I am, under 18 years of age, or I am not a part-time or full-time teacher at Pitt Academy”.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?

You can choose not to participate. There will be no repercussions for doing so.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted at Pitt Academy within the Sadie Saulter Educational Center.

The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 1 time for 1 hour at the end of the 2024/2025 School year.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to do the following: Participate in a focus group interview that will take place at the end of the 2024/2025 school year. The focus group interview will consist of a whole group discussion that is driven by interview questions on the staff member experiences while providing MTSS interventions. The focus group interview will be recorded using Microsoft Teams. Microsoft teams will also be used to audio record and transcribe the interview questions and participate responses. The principal investigator will have access to the recordings to use the data to conduct the research study on MTSS implementation in our alternative program. The data that is collected from the focus interview will be kept secure for a period of five years before being properly discarded by deleting computer files and shredded hard copies of the interview transcripts. No photographs will be required for the focus group interviews. I have attached the focus group survey questions to this consent form so that the participates can review them.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?

We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

Unfortunately, we will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

ECU and the organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research, based on the reviewing the consent documents to ensure the study is being conducted properly by the principal investigator. No names or photographs will be used otherwise for this research.

- The investigator(s) conducting this study.

- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?

The data that is collected from the focus interview will be kept secure for a period of five years before being properly discarded. During the five-year period the data from the focus group interview will be kept on a secure password protected file on the principal investigator's computer. The hard copy transcripts of the focus interviews will be kept under lock and key in the principal investigator's office. The data from the focus interviews will be used to improve the process by which our alternative learning program provides support to students enrolled in the program. Insight from the practices will be a valuable resource to glean important information on practices that are effective and practices that need improvement.

What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at **252-327-8121**

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may contact the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above, and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

Janarde Cannon

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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Appendix C: Student Assent Form

Assent Form-Student

Things You Should Know Before You Agree to Take Part in this Research

IRB Study # _____

Title of Study: Analyzing the Experiences of Staff, Students and Parents on the Effects of MTSS Interventions and Supports for Students Enrolled in an Alternative Learning Program

Person in charge of study: Janarde Cannon
Where they work: Pitt County Schools
Study contact phone number: 252-327-8121
Study contact E-mail Address: cannonj@pitt.k12.nc.us

People at ECU study ways to make people's lives better. These studies are called research. This research is trying to find out how well students that are enrolled in an alternative learning program respond to various interventions of academic and behavioral support.

Your parent(s) needs to give permission for you to be in this research. You do not have to be in this research if you don't want to, even if your parent(s) has already given permission.

You may stop being in the study at any time. If you decide to stop, no one will be angry or upset with you

Why are you doing this research study?

The reason for doing this research is to seek out effective ways to help students that struggle with learning and behavior.

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

We are asking you to take part in this research because you are enrolled in the Pitt Academy Alternative Learning Program within the Pitt County Schools District.

How many people will take part in this study?

If you decide to be in this research, you will be one of about 8 people taking part in it.

What will happen during this study?

The Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework (MTSS) is a framework that is designed to support students with academic growth. The MTSS framework focuses on providing students with tiered support that may struggle with learning certain subject concepts or behavior. The MTSS framework is used within schools all over the state of North Carolina. Pitt County Schools has also implemented MTSS within all of its schools. We will be implementing the MTSS framework at Pitt Academy during the 2024/2025 school year. Students will be exposed to various interventions if they show any signs of academic or behavioral struggle. These

interventions could be in the form of extra support from their teacher or other staff members. Student progress will be monitored by staff to ensure they are progressing with their course work and behavior. The MTSS framework is required by the of State of North Carolina as well as the Pitt County School district. The research portion of this study seeks to obtain the insight of students that are being provided with the MTSS framework supports. This study will conduct interviews with student participants that are enrolled in Pitt Academy. The interviews will take place at the end of the 2024/2025 school year. The audio of these interviews will be recorded and transcribed on paper. No names or student identities will be used in the research. No photographs will be taken or used during this research. This study will also ask students to complete a demographic survey before the interviews are conducted. The survey seeks to gain the student's grade, age, gender, ethnic background and reason for enrolling at Pitt Academy. No names will be given and student identities will not be revealed for this survey. I have attached both the survey and interview questions to this consent form for review. It is the hope of the principal investigator to use the data from the survey and interviews to improve on the process by which we support student academic growth at Pitt Academy.

Who will be told the things we learn about you in this study?

The findings of this study will be presented to a committee made up of ECU Faculty and Pitt County Schools staff. After final approval, the findings of this study may be presented to the staff at Pitt County Schools and Pitt Academy Alternative Program.

What are the good things that might happen?

The benefits to you of being in this study may be that you are successful as a result of the support interventions that you receive during the inquiry. Future students will also benefit from this study as we use the research data to refine and improve on our process to support student success in school.

What are the bad things that might happen?

Research often comes with "risks." We don't know of any risk (chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life.

Will you get any money or gifts for being in this research study?

You will not receive any money or gifts for being in this research study.

Who should you ask if you have any questions?

If you have questions about the research, you should ask the people listed on the first page of this form. If you have other questions about your rights while you are in this research study you may call the Institutional Review Board at 252-744-2914.

If you decide to take part in this research, you should sign your name below. It means that you agree to take part in this research study.

Sign your name here if you want to be in the study

Date

Print your name here if you want to be in the study

Signature of Person Obtaining Assent

Date

Janarde Cannon

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Assent

Appendix D: Parent Consent Form

Parent Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: Analyzing the Experiences of Staff, Students and Parents on the Effects of MTSS Interventions and Supports for Students Enrolled in an Alternative Learning Program

Principal Investigator: Janarde Cannon

Institution, Department or Division: Department of Educational Leadership, College of Education, East Carolina University

Address: Pitt Academy 1019 Fleming Street Greenville NC, 27834

Telephone #: 252-327-8121

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why am I and my child being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this research is to analyze the experience of teachers as they provide MTSS interventions in an alternative learning program. This study will focus on the implementation of MTSS for high school students in our alternative learning program. The driving data for this research will be collect the thoughts and opinion of staff members that are providing the MTSS interventions and supports. You are being invited to take part in this research because you work directly with high school students in our alternative learning program to provide supports. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn how best to serve students while enrolled in our program.

If you give consent for your child to volunteer to take part in this research, they will be one of about 8 people to do so.

What other choices do I and my child have if I do not want my child to take part in this research?

You can choose not to have your child participate. There will be no repercussions for doing so.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted at Pitt Academy within the Sadie Saulter Educational Center. The total amount of time your child will be asked to volunteer for this study is 1 time for 1 hour at the end of the 2024/2025 School year.

What will I and my child be asked to do?

The Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework (MTSS) is a framework that is designed to support students with academic growth. The MTSS framework focuses on providing students with tiered support that may struggle with learning certain subject concepts or behavior. The MTSS framework is used within schools all over the state to North Carolina. Pitt County Schools has also implemented MTSS within all of its schools. We will be implementing the MTSS framework at Pitt Academy during the 2024/2025 school year. Students will be exposed to various interventions if they show any signs of academic or behavioral struggle. These interventions could be in the form of extra support from their teacher or other staff members. Student progress will be monitored by staff to ensure they are progressing with their course work and behavior. The MTSS framework is required by the State of North Carolina as well as the Pitt County School district. The research portion of this study seeks to obtain the insight of students that are being provided with the MTSS framework supports. This study will conduct interviews with student participants that are enrolled in Pitt Academy. The interviews will take place at the end of the 2024/2025 school year. The audio of these interviews will be recorded and transcribed on paper. No names or student identities will be used in the research. No photographs will be taken or used during this research. This study will ask students to complete a demographic survey before the interviews are conducted. The survey seeks to gain the student's grade, age, gender, ethnic background and reason for enrolling at Pitt Academy. No names will be given and student identities will not be revealed for this survey. I have attached both the survey and interview questions to this consent form for review. It is the hope of the principal investigator to use the data from the survey and interviews to improve on the process by which we support student academic growth at Pitt Academy.

What might my I and my child experience if they take part in the research?

We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what your child would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to your child, but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I and my child be paid for taking part in this research?

Unfortunately, we will not be able to pay you or your child for the time they volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me and my child to take part in this research?

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I and my child took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

ECU and the organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research, based on the reviewing the consent documents to ensure the study is being conducted properly by the principal investigator. No names or photographs will be used otherwise for this research.

- The investigator(s) conducting this study.
- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.

How will you keep the information you collect about me and my child secure? How long will you keep it?

The data that is collected from the focus interview will be kept secure for a period of five years before being properly discarded. During the five-year period, the data from the focus group interview and survey will be kept on a secure password protected file on the principal investigator's computer. The hard copy transcripts of the focus interviews and survey will be kept under lock and key in the principal investigator's office. The data from the focus interviews and survey will be used to improve the process by which our alternative learning program provides support to students enrolled in the program. Insight from the MTSS framework support practices will be a valuable resource to glean important information on practices that are effective and practices that need improvement.

What if I decide I and my child don't want to continue in this research?

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized.

Who should I and my child contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at **252-327-8121**

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may contact the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914.

I have decided me and my child want to take part in this research. What should I and my child do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above, and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

Janarde Cannon

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)	Signature	Date
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Appendix E: Student Perception Interview Questions

Student Perception Interview Questions

1. In your own words, why are you enrolled at Meeting the Needs of All Students ALP?

2. How do you feel about school, and learning?

3. What are some of your academic strengths?

4. What are some of your academic weaknesses?

5. How best do you learn? What teaching strategies are most helpful to you?

Appendix F: Staff Focus Group

Thank you for participating in our focus group today. Your responses during this focus group will also be recorded using the Webex software. All of your answers will remain anonymous, not linking back to any information that will be personally identifiable.

Staff Focus Group Interview Questions:

Question 1: Do you believe that all students (i.e., racial, ethnic, economic and level of ability) can grow academically? If so, explain how schools can support these students to ensure academic growth.

Question 2: In your opinion, how did your students respond to the interventions and supports that you provided? Were they receptive or resistant?

Question 3: What do you feel were the most effective supports and interventions that were provided to your students?

Question 4: In your opinion, what would your students say were the most beneficial aspects of the academic interventions you provided this school year?

Question 5: What outcomes have you noticed or documented from providing supports and interventions to your students this school year?

Question 6: What recommendations or changes would you make to the process by which the interventions and supports are provided to students at MDNS alternative learning program?

Appendix G: Student Focus Group Interview

Thank you for participating in our focus group today. Your responses during this focus group will also be recorded using the Microsoft Teams software. All of your answers will remain anonymous, not linking back to any information that will be personally identifiable.

Student Focus Group Interview Questions:

Question 1) List one thing that you feel that you struggle with in regard to school?

Question 2) Were you made aware of why you were being exposed to interventions to support you with behavior and academic at MDNS alternative learning program?

Question 3) Do you feel that the interventions that you were exposed to while enrolled at MDNS alternative learning program helped you improve in the academic or behavioral area that you struggled with?

Follow up Question to Question 3: What aspects of the academic interventions help support you? Was there a particular process or method of support that resonated with you, that led to improvement?

Question 4) In your opinion, what would your parent/guardian say were the most beneficial aspects of the academic or behavioral interventions that you were exposed to at MNAS-ALP?

Follow up to Question 4: Why would your parent/guardian say that...? What has transpired in your school performance that would cause your parent to say that?

Question 5) What recommendations or changes would you recommend to the process by which the interventions and supports are provided to students at MDNS-ALP?

Appendix H: Parent Interview Questions:

Question 1.) In your own words, why was your child assigned to the Meeting the Needs of All Students Alternative Learning Program?

Question 2.) Upon enrolling at MNAS-ALP, what were your child's biggest needs for academic and behavioral support?

Question 3.) Are you aware of any interventions and supports that your child received while enrolled at Pitt Academy?

Question 4.) Are you satisfied with the instructional support that your child received at MNAS-ALP? Why or Why Not?

Question 5.) Are there any specific interventions and supports that you thought were very beneficial to your child while enrolled in MNAS-ALP?

Question 6.) Do you have any other thoughts and opinions on the interventions and supports that your child was exposed to while enrolled at the MNAS-ALP?

Appendix I: MTSS Belief Survey

MTSS Belief Survey (Staff)

Please complete the MTSS Beliefs Survey

Rate each item in the following way: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree,
5 = Strongly Agree

MTSS Beliefs Survey

Please complete the MTSS Beliefs Survey

Rate each item in the following way: 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

1. I believe that all subgroups (i.e., racial, ethnic, economic and program area) can reach proficiency with the current standards

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1. Strongly Disagree
- ☐ 2. Disagree
- ☐ 3. Neutral
- ☐ 4. Agree
- ☐ 5. Strongly Agree

2. Tier One or Core Instruction (classroom instruction provided to all students) should be effective enough to result in at least 80 % of students achieving benchmarks in Reading with Tier One alone.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1. Strongly Disagree
- ☐ 2. Disagree

- ☐ 3. Neutral
- ☐ 4. Agree
- ☐ 5. Strongly Agree

3. Tier One or Core Instruction³ (classroom instruction provided to all students)
*should be effective enough to result in at least 80 % of students achieving benchmarks in Math with Tier One alone.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1. Strongly Disagree
- ☐ 2. Disagree
- ☐ 3. Neutral
- ☐ 4. Agree
- ☐ 5. Strongly Agree

4. Universal instruction in behavioral expectations and social skills is the responsibility of the public schools.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1. Strongly Disagree
- ☐ 2. Disagree
- ☐ 3. Neutral
- ☐ 4. Agree
- ☐ 5. Strongly Agree

5. The primary function of Tier Two or supplemental instruction/intervention is to ensure students achieve grade level benchmarks

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1. Strongly Disagree
- ☐ 2. Disagree
- ☐ 3. Neutral
- ☐ 4. Agree
- ☐ 5. Strongly Agree

6. The primary function of Tier Three or intensive instruction/intervention is to ensure students are growing toward achieving grade level benchmarks.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1. Strongly Disagree
- ☐ 2. Disagree
- ☐ 3. Neutral
- ☐ 4. Agree
- ☐ 5. Strongly Agree

7. The majority of students with Specific Learning Disabilities can achieve grade-level benchmarks in Reading.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1. Strongly Disagree
- ☐ 2. Disagree
- ☐ 3. Neutral
- ☐ 4. Agree
- ☐ 5. Strongly Agree

8. The majority of students with Specific Learning Disabilities can achieve grade-level benchmarks in Math.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1. Strongly Disagree
- ☐ 2. Disagree
- ☐ 3. Neutral
- ☐ 4. Agree
- ☐ 5. Strongly Agree

9. The majority of students with Specific Learning Disabilities can achieve grade-level benchmarks in Reading.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1. Strongly Disagree
- ☐ 2. Disagree
- ☐ 3. Neutral
- ☐ 4. Agree
- ☐ 5. Strongly Agree

10. Additional staff support would enable regular education teachers to implement more differentiated instruction to meet the needs of all students.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1. Strongly Disagree
- ☐ 2. Disagree
- ☐ 3. Neutral
- ☐ 4. Agree
- ☐ 5. Strongly Agree

11. Prevention and early intervention results in fewer referrals to Special Education

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1. Strongly Disagree
- ☐ 2. Disagree
- ☐ 3. Neutral
- ☐ 4. Agree
- ☐ 5. Strongly Agree

12. Some students currently identified as having a Specific Learning Disability do not
*have a true disability but rather did not receive instruction and intervention of
adequate intensity to close the gap in their skill levels.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1. Strongly Disagree
- ☐ 2. Disagree
- ☐ 3. Neutral
- ☐ 4. Agree
- ☐ 5. Strongly Agree

13. Additional time and resources should be allocated first to students not reaching
benchmarks.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1. Strongly Disagree
- ☐ 2. Disagree
- ☐ 3. Neutral

☐

4. Agree

☐

5. Strongly Agree

14. Graphing student data makes it easier for educators to make decisions about student performance and needed interventions.

Mark only one oval.

☐

1. Strongly Disagree

☐

2. Disagree

☐

3. Neutral

☐

4. Agree

☐

5. Strongly Agree

15. A student's family should be involved in problem-solving.

Mark only one oval.

☐

1. Strongly Disagree

☐

2. Disagree

☐

3. Neutral

☐

4. Agree

☐

5. Strongly Agree

16. When students do not respond to instruction and/or intervention, the following should be examined: a) the intervention was implemented with fidelity, b) the intervention was delivered with sufficient intensity, and c) a different intervention is needed.

Mark only one oval.

☐

1. Strongly Disagree

- ☐ 2. Disagree
- ☐ 3. Neutral
- ☐ 4. Agree
- ☐ 5. Strongly Agree

17. When students do not respond to instruction and/or intervention, teams should
*ensure that the problem was thoroughly analyzed through diagnostic
assessments/processes to find the root cause of the skill gap

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1. Strongly Disagree
- ☐ 2. Disagree
- ☐ 3. Neutral
- ☐ 4. Agree
- ☐ 5. Strongly Agree