# Tier 2 Social and Emotional Learning Interventions of a Multi-Tier System of Support: Literature Review

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**Abstract**
There are many students who face barriers and difficulties to display social emotional learning competencies. As result of lacking these skills, students become less connected to school as they proceed from elementary to middle to high school and negatively impact their academic performance, behavior, and health. Research shows that small group instruction is highly effective in helping students master essential skills and tasks. The purpose of this paper is to review social and emotional learning interventions at Tier 2 of a Multi-Tier System of Support (MTSS). The secondary intervention tier utilizes targeted interventions in small groups identified by support team and then employ them by using effective strategies that directly target a skill deficit. This paper includes a review of evidence-based practices for improving social-emotional outcomes and interventions for behavioral problems.
**Keywords:** social-emotional learning, multi-tier system of support, tier 2, and evidence-based practice.

## 1.  Introduction

There is increasing acknowledgement among practitioners and researchers that pupil's success relies not only on accomplishment of core academic subjects but also learning intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies. The field of education has made considerable developments and improvements in school-based interventions such as social emotional learning programs (Merrell, 2010). Developing these skills should begin in an early stage and continue throughout the childhood and adolescence affected by relationships, social environments, informal interactions and structured programs (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Zins and Elias (2006) defined social emotional learning as "the process of acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to recognize and manage emotions; developing caring and concern for others; making responsible decisions; establishing positive relationships; and handling challenging situations capably" (p. 1). The purpose of this paper is to review social and emotional learning interventions at Tier 2 of a Multi-Tier System of Support (MTSS).

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides teachers an opportunity to recognize the significance of developing the students' social-emotional skills as tools for academics and life (Ferguson, 2016). According to ESSA, States are required to incorporate at least one "nonacademic" indicator of the student's level into their accountability systems, establish learning environments and enhance students' effective learning skills that are essential for the school readiness and academic success (Ferguson, 2016). In addition, the act emphasizes on the use of evidence-based interventions and provide flexibility to States and school districts regarding the use of federal funds, including funds that could be used to enhance social and emotional learning (Grant, Hamilton, Wrabel, Gomez, Whitaker, Leschitz, & Harris, 2017).

Regrettably, many students have difficulties to display social emotional learning competencies (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). According to U.S. Department of Education, educators continue to struggle to address the needs of students, who have social, emotional, or behavioral difficulties and problems (Saeki et al., 2011). As a consequence of lacking these skills, students become less connected to school as they proceed from elementary to middle to high school and negatively impact their academic performance, behavior, and health (Durlak, et al., 2011). Saeki et al. (2011) indicated that social emotional and behavioral issues are highly linked to poor school related outcomes. A report of recent research pointed out that children who attend kindergarten with underdeveloped social and behavioral skills, are more likely to be retained in grade level, identified for special education services, and suspended or expelled from school (Bettencourt, Gross, & Ho, 2016). In addition, a very tiny amount of time and energy is spent on serving a small number of individuals with social-emotional and behavior problems (Saeki et al., 2011).

Research elucidates that an emphasis on social-emotional learning can enhance, rather than detract from, schools' core missions of improving academic achievement and attainment (Osher et al., 2016). Therefore, Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) seek to address and target students who exhibit social, emotional, and behavioral problems by implementing evidence-based practices (EBPs) (Cook, Lyon, Kubergovic, Wright, & Zhang, 2015). MTSS is a proactive, prevention-oriented service delivery framework that aims to meet all students' needs through the implementation of a continuum of EBPs by data-driven decision making (Cook, Lyon, Kubergovic, Wright, & Zhang, 2015). Students with emotional and behavioral problems are in need for MTSS because of the challenges

they encounter due to the severity of their behavioral and academic problems (Benner, Kutash, Nelson, & Fisher, 2013).

MTSS like positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) and response-to-intervention (RTI) are used and adopted by schools in order to assist students to meet their needs (Bruhn, Lane, & Hirsch, 2014). Both models directly address the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral development of children and youth, from early childhood through adolescence and represent the foundation of a comprehensive MTSS framework (Averill, Rinaldi & Collaborative, 2011). These frameworks promote positive academic and behavioral outcomes related to students and provide safe and affirmative school climate (Ziomek-Daigle, Goodman-Scott, Cavin & Donohue, 2016).

Social and emotional learning interventions support student social and emotional development through explicit instruction, purposefully strengthening cognitive processes, emotional competencies, and social and interpersonal skills needed for successful self-regulation (Smith, Poling, & Worth, 2018). MTSS comprises of a three-tiered approach, including tier 1, tier 2, and tier 3 (Bruhn, Lane, & Hirsch, 2014). At each tier, students who are slow or making inadequate progress will be moved to the next tier level in order to receive more intensive instruction and data are collected at each tier to monitor progress (Bradley et al., 2007). To illustrate, the student who started in tier 1 and was not able to respond to the intervention, will move to tier 2 interventions to receive more intensive levels of instruction and intervention combined with more frequent progress monitoring (Hughes, & Dexter, 2011). It is also important to obtain parental consent for students who are identified to receive private tutoring and a more intense intervention.

## 2. Tier 2 Interventions

Tier 2 or as also known the secondary intervention tier comprises of approximately 15% of the student population (Berkeley, Bender, Gregg Peaster, & Saunders, 2009). In addition, tier 2 uses targeted interventions in small groups. Research shows that small group instruction is highly effective in helping students master essential skills and tasks (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2010). According to Truscott et al. (2005), the secondary interventions tier can also be private tutoring by special education teacher or general education teacher. Most interventions in this tier are delivered by using strategies that directly target a skill deficit (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2010). Tier 2's goals are to provide further attention, narrower concentration, greater support, and more opportunities to practice (Greenwood et al., 2011). Another goal is also to decrease current cases of problem behavior and/or academic failure to prohibit student issues from increasing or escalating to an intensity that requires individualized planning (Mitchell, Stormont & Gage, 2011). At tier 2, social-emotional and behavioral programs typically direct considerable attention on teaching school-wide behavioral expectations to students who are at-risk in small segments (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2015).

It is guided by supporting evidence and instructional approaches that are embedded to meet the academic and nonacademic needs or goals of students in small segments or individually. Tier 2 interventions are utilized similarly across students who display prevalent behavior issues (e.g., repeatedly tardy, in classroom disruptions, organizational problems, social skills deficits), and who may respond to similar interventions (Campbell, Rodriguez, Anderson, & Barnes, 2013). Mitchell, Stormont and Gage (2011) indicated that hallmark features of Tier 2 level consists of rapid access to intervention, low-effort teacher implementation facilitated by a team-based approach, progress monitoring to determine the effectiveness of the intervention and the need for making decision regarding the intervention.

By implementing tier 2, the student support team should use ongoing formative assessment to identify pupils who require additional support and specific needs (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2010). There should be a standard assessment plan and clear criteria for entering and exiting students from the secondary intervention tier (Greenwood et al., 2011). The types of support in this tier have to be designed to rapidly screen for and target students who are in need for extra instruction or services to get back on track. The support team of the student has to identify the student's needs of tier 2 interventions in order to facilitate the implementation of the intervention (Ziomek-Daigle, Goodman-Scott, Cavin & Donohue, 2016). The team is also responsible to make decisions regarding fading or ending the intervention once the student maintains positive progress (Ziomek-Daigle, Goodman-Scott, Cavin & Donohue, 2016).

Buffum, Mattos, and Weber (2010) indicated that for tier 2 effective interventions, they should be timely structured and mandatory as well as they have to focus the cause of a student's struggles rather than on a symptom. Moreover, these researchers highly recommend that trained and qualified educators should administer interventions. They also emphasize on using universal screening data to identify students lacking the prerequisite skills for a fundamental standard before providing the designated intervention. In the secondary interventions tier, students are identified by whether universal screening or educators who have experiences of social, emotional, or behavioral difficulties that their students exhibit (Wilson & Lipsey, 2007).

### 3. Evidence Based Practice For Improving Social Emotional Outcomes

There is an increased attention of the use of scientifically based behavioral interventions to prevent the development of problem behaviors and address the need of students with behavioral challenges (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2015). The outcomes show improvement in social-behavioral as well as academics when interventions based empirical evidence are implemented with fidelity and integrity. According to Horner, Sugai,and Anderson (2010), the majority of research based MTSS applications for behavioral challenges are conceptualized and implemented within a PBIS or a school-wide positive behavior support (SWPBS) framework. Fundamental evidence supports the utility of PBIS or SWPBS as an effective MTSS approach to prevent social emotional-behavioral challenges, to close the gap between identification and intervention and to enhance success for all learners.

Grant et al. (2017) stated that the secondary intervention tier must come from rigorous quasi-experimental research and studies; which approximates experimental studies by specifying a comparison group that is similar to the intervention group participants on observed pre-intervention characteristics. Within special education, methods of single subject case are accepted and valid designs to demonstrate intervention influences, and researchers can control extraneous factors and clarify the relationships between dependent variables and independent variables (Mitchell, Stormont, & Gage, 2011). According to ESSA standards, the quality of studies in tier 2 contains statistically significant, positive results from studies that determined baseline equivalence between the groups in the analytic sample (Grant et al., 2017). These studies include non-randomly assigned individuals or groups of participants to the social emotional learning intervention or comparison group or randomly assigned participants or groups to social- emotional learning or comparator interventions but had high attrition.

### 4. Common Interventions for Behavioral Problems in Tier 2

The strategies of secondary intervention level are provided for individuals who require more structured behavioral interventions, more frequent and contingent behavior feedback, and/ or more active supervision and monitoring by educators (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2015). Durlak and colleagues (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions and found there were four components for the most effective programs of enhancing students' social and emotional learning outcomes. These components include sequenced activities lead to learn skills in a coordinated and connected way, active forms of learning, focused instruction to develop one or more social skills, and explicit lessons that target specific skills.

Particular intervention strategies and methods that have empirical support are proposed for use as tier 2 interventions, including modeling and guided practice strategies, coaching strategies, supportive and corrective feedback, peer-mediated strategies, and self-monitoring strategies (Greenwood et al. 2011; Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2015). Educators, who are going to implement these strategies, have to follow specific steps and procedures to assure they are conducted in a systematic manner. The important steps when implementing modeling and guided practice include determining the skill or competency that most benefit the student, modeling the target behavior for the child multiple times, giving chances for them to practice the target behavior, providing expanded experiences in which the skill or competence can be applied and used successfully, and presenting specific and corrective feedback by stating or describing explicitly how and why the behavior was appropriate or inappropriate.

Peer-mediated Instructions (peer proximity, peer prompting, peer initiation Peer-buddy interventions, and peer tutoring) also have considerable and empirical support for tier 2 (Greenwood et al. 2011; Latz et al. 2009). Peer-mediated approaches incorporate the student's peers as models or instructors to enhance his/her development of emotional-social competencies. These strategies provide alternative learning opportunities such as respond to aggression and conflict, and help to complete assignments. Other common behavioral interventions of tier 2 also include existing additional support programs that require minimal personnel time to implement such as check-in, check-out and also known as the behavior education program (EPD), check & connect, and first step to success (Hawken, Vincent, & Schumann, 2008).

The Check in/ Check out (CICO) or Behavior Education Program (BEP) was developed to reduce problem behavior that target secondary level students (Filter et al. 2007). The purpose of CICO intervention is to enhance antecedent prompts for appropriate behavior, increase contingent adult feedback, improve the daily structure for students during school day, and increase feedback to families about the child's behavior. According to Simonsen, Myers, and Briere (2011) experimental single-subject studies' results indicate the effectiveness of CICO interventions with different participants' ages and school settings. At the beginning of the day, schools' mentors review the behavioral expectations with the target students (check in) including possible solutions to respond to any potential obstacles (Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010; Swoszowski, McDaniel, Jolivette, & Melius, 2013). Students carry around a point card that provides opportunities for mentors' behavioral feedback throughout the day to help students practice the desirable behavior, and review their goal for getting daily points. At the end of the day, students give the card point to portents to sign and return it to the school (check-out).

Check & Connect is a dropout prevention program and comprehensive model used to promote individuals' engagement with school, and it is data-driven and designed to increase personal contact and opportunities to build

trusting relationships (Sinclair, Christenson, Lehr, & Anderson, 2003; Hawken, Vincent, & Schumann, 2008). The approach allows students and an adult in the school to "check in" on behavioral barriers and "connect" by creating a caring relationship, containing aspects of psychological engagement, behavioral engagement and cognitive engagement (Kern, George, & Weist, 2016). Check & Connect emphasizes the school and home connection through trained school-based mentors (Bradshaw, Pas, Debnam, & Lindstrom Johnson, 2015; Yong, & Cheney, 2013).

First Step to Success (FSS) is an effective secondary-level intervention to reduce the number of psychosocial risk factors and improve the overall well-being and adjustment of young individuals at risk (Ozdemir, 2011). FSS is an early intervention that is designed for at-risk primary level, elementary school students who display clear signs of emerging externalizing behavior problem (Frey et al., 2013). According to Seeley et al. (2017) FSS is also identified as an intervention for preschool or Head Start classroom use, and teachers can utilize it as a part of their classroom routine. FSS is a school–home intervention that consists of three components (Sumi et al., 2013). They are the universal screening, classroom-based intervention, and in-home parent education.

A key factor for successful social and emotional interventions is the implementation fidelity and quality by measuring and evaluating its influence in relation to the outcomes (Zins and Elias, 2006). Schools should adequately work to implement interventions with fidelity for social behavior in order to acquire the desired outcomes (Hawken, Vincent, & Schumann, 2008). It is important that school personnel select appropriate goals and focus on changing behavior that students are capable of learning the keystone of social-emotional and behavioral competencies which have powerful influences on behavioral adjustment such as following directions, demonstrating self-control, making positive comments toward others, joining others in play or small groups. Strategies selected to achieve goals should be simple, uncomplicated and easy to follow in order to result in high integrity and efficacy level of the intervention along with interveners scaffolding and supporting the behavior appropriately (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2015).

## 5. Conclusion

Social emotional and behavioral issues that students suffer from are tightly connected with a variety of poor school-related outcomes. These problems result of lacking these skills, students become less connected to school as they proceed from elementary to middle to high school and negatively impact their academic performance, behavior, and health. As this research indicated that a small amount of students receive assistance regarding the enhancement of social-emotional and behavior skills. Many studies and research's views as previously presented in this study indicate that social-emotional learning competences are important for students to acquire since they improve cognitive processes and social and interpersonal skills needed for successful self-regulation as well as improving academic achievement and attainment.

MTSS as a systemic and ongoing improvement framework seek to address and target students who exhibit social, emotional, and behavioral problems. MTSS include three tiers (tier 1, tier 2, and tier 3) and those who are making inadequate progress will be moved to the next tier level. Specifically, this literature discussed social and emotional learning interventions for Tier 2 of MTSS. The secondary intervention tier utilize targeted interventions in small groups identified by support team and then employ them by using strategies that directly target a skill deficit. It is important to use interventions that are scientifically evidence-based practices in order to increase social-emotional outcomes as the research show. Explicit strategies, peer-mediated instructions, as well as check-in, check-out, check & connect, and first step to success are effective interventions to be used for the secondary level interventions. Finally, fidelity and integrity must be well designed and implemented to gain positive outcomes.

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