

# Monitoring Fidelity of School-level Practices



## What is fidelity?

Fidelity has to do with intervention integrity – the degree to which a practice is implemented in a way that is faithful to the guiding model. Fidelity involves adherence (doing what is prescribed, and not doing what is proscribed, by the model) and competence (the quality, skills, and contextual responsiveness with which the model is implemented).<sup>1</sup>

## Why assess fidelity?

Practitioners tend to unwittingly “drift” from the intervention model in the absence of fidelity assessment. Assessing fidelity also helps make sense of the outcomes of an intervention. For instance, if outcomes are poor, but fidelity was strong, we would tend to suspect that other factors were the prime contributors to the disappointing result.<sup>2</sup> Ratings of actual performance by trained observers tend to produce the most reliable, valid, and credible fidelity assessments.<sup>3</sup>

## Why is fidelity important for MTSS-B school practices?

High fidelity implementation of the overarching MTSS-B framework is associated with reduced student problem behavior and discipline events;<sup>4</sup> enhanced social-emotional functioning,<sup>5</sup> attendance,<sup>6</sup> and academic achievement<sup>7</sup>; and enhanced school climate<sup>8</sup>. Equally important is achieving fidelity to the individual practices and interventions implemented within the larger MTSS-B framework. Only when implemented with fidelity can evidence-based and promising practices approach the outcomes observed in the research environments in which they have been developed and tested.<sup>9</sup>

## How can we measure fidelity of school-level practices?

Measuring fidelity involves articulating and monitoring implementation of the critical components of a practice/intervention in your local environment. Some evidence-based practices come packaged with well-established fidelity measures. Others either do not have an established fidelity tools, or they are too cumbersome for routine deployment in typical school environments (e.g., technical tools involving direct observation by highly trained raters). In such cases, the MTSS-B Toolkit offers two options: 1) the **Advanced Tier Intervention Fidelity Template**, which guides you through the process of creating an intervention-specific fidelity tool and 2) the **Advanced Tier Intervention Quality Tool**, which provides a method for tracking implementation quality across your entire MTSS-B intervention portfolio, by using the presence of key implementation science indicators as a proxy for fidelity.

## Advanced Tier Intervention Fidelity Template

This tool guides you through the process of developing a fidelity measure for any given Advanced Tier practice or intervention. The first step is to articulate the critical components of the practice model, what those components should ideally look like in practice (the “gold standard”), and how each of them is thought to lead to positive student outcomes. For established practice models (e.g., evidence-based and promising practices), refer to practice manuals, training materials, books, articles, or other documentation to identify the critical components. Be sure that you capture any alterations or adaptation of the original practice through one or more critical components. For new or emerging practices, you may have to articulate the practice model without the aid of manuals or other written documentation. Developing a logic model (aka a “theory of change”) can serve as a useful stepping stone in this regard.



Once the practice model is articulated, you then assess fidelity by rating the degree to which actual implementation has met the gold standard for each critical component. Ideally, the assessment would be completed by a supervisor, coach, or colleague who is familiar with the practice model, based on live, video-, or audio-taped observation. Once a month is sufficient for observer-based ratings. Fidelity can also be self-assessed by whomever is implementing the practice, immediately following delivery of a session or some other part of the practice. While this has the advantage of promoting self-reflection, it will also generally result in less accurate and reliable scores.

## Advanced Tier Intervention Quality Tool

If developing a specific fidelity measure for each Advanced Tier practice is beyond your means, turn to the **Advanced Tier Intervention Quality Tool**. Using this tool, you can rate the quality of any/all of your Advanced Tier practices on a set of common metrics informed by implementation science – including your specification and use of a guiding model, how well that model is supported by evidence, and the degree to which it is a good fit for your student population. It also asks you to rate the adequacy of key implementation supports such as training, coaching, monitoring, and school infrastructure. This tool is scored by an Advanced Tier team member with input from the school staff who are implementing each practice. It can also be self-administered by the relevant school staff, although this will generally result in less reliable and accurate scores.

<sup>1</sup> Schoenwald, S. K., Garland, A. F., Chapman, J. E., Frazier, S. L., Sheidow, A. J., & Southam-Gerow, M. A. (2011). Toward the effective and efficient measurement of implementation fidelity. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 38(1), 32–43. doi:10.1007/s10488-010-0321-0

<sup>2</sup> Schoenwald, S. K., Garland, A. F., Chapman, J. E., Frazier, S. L., Sheidow, A. J., & Southam-Gerow, M. A. (2011). Toward the effective and efficient measurement of implementation fidelity. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 38(1), 32–43. doi:10.1007/s10488-010-0321-0

<sup>3</sup> Bruns, E. J., Weathers, E. S., Suter, J. C., Hensley, S., Pullmann, M. D., & Sather, A. (2014). Psychometrics, reliability, and validity of a Wraparound Team Observation Measure. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 1–13. doi:10.1007/s10826-014-9908-5

<sup>4</sup> Horner R.H., Sugai, G., & Anderson, C.M. (2010). Examining the evidence for school-wide positive behavior support. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 42(8), 1-14.

<sup>5</sup> Bradshaw, C. Waasdorp, T.E., & Leaf, P.J. (2012). Effects of School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports on child behavior problems. *Pediatrics*, 130(5), 1136–1145. doi: 10.1542/peds.2012-0243

<sup>6</sup> Freeman, J., Wilkinson, S., Kowitz, J., Kittelman, A., & Brigi Flannery, K. (2018). Research-supported practices for improving attendance in high schools: A review of the literature. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 24(8), 481-503.

<sup>7</sup> Eber, L., Esperanza, J., Horner, R. H., Nakasato, J., Smolkowski, K., Sugai, G., et al. (2009). A randomized, wait-list controlled effectiveness trial as sessing School-Wide Positive Behavior Support in elementary schools. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 11(3), 133-144.

<sup>8</sup> Horner R.H., Sugai, G., & Anderson, C.M. (2010). Examining the evidence for school-wide positive behavior support. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 42(8), 1-14.

<sup>9</sup> Fixsen, D.L., Naoom, S.F., Blase, K.A., & Wallace, F. (2007). Implementation: The missing link between research and practice. *APSAC Advisor Excerpt*, 19(1-2), 4-11.