

Clover High School, Clover, South Carolina

Clover High School is a large, suburban high school located near Charlotte, North Carolina. In 2021-22 the school had 2,617 students, with 18% qualifying for free or reduced-price lunches¹, 4% Limited English Proficiency, and 15% students with a disability. The school's graduation rate was 96%.²

Interview Date: January 2023

¹ Enrollment and free/reduced-price lunch data: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/schoolsearch/index.asp>

² Graduation rate, LEP, and SWD data: Clover High School

Background and Catalyst

The school began identifying and supporting students through what they once called “Care Teams” about seven years ago. Care Teams consisted of the counselors, social worker, and an assistant principal who considered the needs of students struggling academically, with a focus on seniors who were at risk of not graduating. Students referred by teachers, parents, or others would be placed on a “watch list,” which was managed using a spreadsheet, and the Care Team decided on the actions needed to support the student.

By 2020, the elementary and middle schools in the district were implementing a robust MTSS framework and the current high school principal wanted to strengthen the high school's efforts as well. When a new assistant principal joined the high school in March 2020, she undertook efforts to expand and strengthen MTSS. Her hiring coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, and COVID ultimately served as a catalyst for expanded MTSS efforts as school staff saw the need to better identify and support students who were suddenly thrown into a hybrid school schedule that included only two in-person days per week.

The Present: What Does MTSS Look Like Now?

Leadership: Vision, Teams, Structures, and Processes

MTSS aligns with the “whole child” focus of Clover High School and the district's motto: “*Each Child, Each Day, Excellence.*” One of the school's assistant principals serves as the MTSS Coordinator, but all three assistant principals take active roles in leading MTSS efforts. The school also employs one full-time academic interventionist and one certified teacher assistant who manage the MTSS lab where students receive support.

As the school transitioned from the original Care Team model of MTSS to what they now call Student Support Teams, an MTSS Committee comprised of teachers from each department, the school psychologist, administrators, and technology innovation coach was formed to guide the school's efforts and create buy-in. Staff who seemed resistant to the new efforts were intentionally invited to participate as the MTSS Committee's work began. Interviewees reported that this resistant group ultimately became some of the biggest champions for MTSS as a result of their participation in the committee. Currently, the MTSS Committee oversees the school's MTSS efforts and provides professional learning on MTSS topics to school staff. The academic interventionist also meets monthly with teachers in each department to review MTSS updates and discuss supports for students.

The Student Support Teams are led by administrators using a case management model and meet weekly. Students in 10th through 12th grades (9th graders are in a 9th grade center that uses its own MTSS structures) are divided alphabetically into three groups and assigned to one of the three assistant principals. The Student

Support Teams include each administrator, the two school counselors, the social worker, and others as needed, such as the academic interventionist, school resource officer, or mental health counselors. Each assistant principal maintains a spreadsheet with “watch lists” of students in need of or currently receiving support. There are separate lists for seniors at risk of not graduating on time, students in the alternative school setting, winter graduates, students experiencing grief and loss, and others. The spreadsheets are used to track student contacts and supports and only Student Support Team members can access them. Interviewees reported that the students on three of the watchlists from one assistant principal’s spreadsheet numbered more than 60, or about 10% of that assistant principal’s caseload.

The school’s efforts initially focused on academic support, but as of Fall 2022 there is a comprehensive schoolwide referral process for students with academic, behavioral, attendance, mental health, social-emotional, or substance abuse concerns. Staff refer students to the Student Support Teams using a Google Form developed by the MTSS Committee and technology innovation coach. Short documents made available to staff on an internal school webpage outline the information teachers are expected to enter into the form and provide guidance on when to refer students and the supports available at Tiers 1 and 2 of MTSS.

Student Supports

Interviewees report that teachers have become much more involved in providing student supports over the last three years, as the school developed more formal MTSS structures and engaged teachers in the MTSS Committee. In 2021-22, six teachers on the MTSS Committee served as interventionists during their planning times, working with small groups of struggling students weekly. Currently, on Wednesday, one hour of each 90-minute class period is designated “Flex Time.” Teachers schoolwide transition from 30 minutes of instruction to providing one hour of Tier 2 academic support to students in that class.

In Fall 2022 the school added a second computer lab called the MTSS Lab where students can report for academic support. The academic interventionist and a certified teacher assistant supervise and assist students in this lab. Some students who are not successful with traditional classes can go to this lab to complete self-paced personalized online classes. The school is also working on finding ways to help teachers provide Tier 2 support within the classroom and is piloting [Exact Path through Edmentum](#), a virtual platform offering individualized, direct student instruction, as a potential Tier 2 intervention resource in a few math and English classes.

Impacts of MTSS on the School

One outcome of Clover High School’s work to improve MTSS structures has been the increased awareness and buy-in of classroom teachers into MTSS processes and interventions. Staff actively use MTSS guidance and the processes that have been established. Staff’s understanding of why the school is doing MTSS has increased, such that interviewees report it feels as if “we are all working towards the same goal.” The MTSS leaders also report that more students now have direct contact and better relationships with staff, and these connections are helping improve student achievement. Family engagement has also increased as a result of the school’s MTSS efforts, strengthening trust and communication.

What Challenges Did the School Encounter with MTSS Implementation?

A shift in student needs due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Students returning to school following the nationwide shutdown in March 2020 attended in person only two days per week at Clover High School. When the school’s regular schedule resumed, student attendance, academic progress, and mental health needs were greater challenges than prior to COVID. These needs ultimately served as a catalyst for MTSS efforts at this school. There are ongoing efforts to engage students in school life through clubs, such as a Black Culture Club, Outback Club, and Dungeons & Dragons & Gaming Club. The school reports that its efforts to strengthen its MTSS processes led to the development of these clubs as staff became better acquainted with students’ needs.

Equipping teachers to provide support

After three years of working to increase school-wide understanding of the vision and structure for MTSS, a current challenge is to continue the school’s growth and better equip teachers to provide student supports within the classroom. This would expand the capacity for academic intervention given that approximately 1,800 10th-12th grade students are currently being supported by a single academic interventionist. School leaders are examining resources teachers can use for screening and Tier 2 intervention and looking for ways to help teachers better use their Flex Time hour each week.

“We all have that kind of goal to just keep moving. Let's keep finding more supports that we can provide for our students.”

Advice for Other Schools

Have a vision for MTSS

This school saw its whole-child vision for MTSS as interacting nicely with its existing district and town mottos: “*Each Child, Each Day, Excellence*” and “The Town with Love in the Middle.” It is important to have a vision for what MTSS is designed to do and be and think through the necessary structures and language to accomplish that vision. For example, this school chose to use the term Student Support Teams instead of Care Teams, as the latter can imply that something is wrong with students but the former better frames the idea that students need supports. Finally, they advise other schools to be patient with efforts to continuously improve MTSS; it takes time and may take many small steps to get the framework right for any particular school context.

Cultivate staff buy-in through transparency and support

Schools should create a team of stakeholders to guide the school’s efforts and create buy-in of the MTSS process. Along the way, MTSS school leaders should continuously communicate with staff to solicit feedback and hear frustrations or points of confusion. Teachers need to know who to contact, how to refer students for support, and occasionally to be reminded of “why we’re doing what we’re doing.”

“The biggest takeaway is making sure that teachers buy in and understand that it's a process that is workable and it's livable and it's doable.”

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