

Belton-Honea Path High School, Honea Path, SC

Belton-Honea Path High School is the only high school in the small, rural Anderson School District 2. In 2021-22 the school had a student population of 1,059, with 49% eligible for free or reduced-price school lunches,¹ 2% Limited English Proficiency, and 16% students with a disability. The school's graduation rate was 90%.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: Belton-Honea Path High School

Background and Catalyst

The high school started implementing MTSS around 2019 following the passage of South Carolina Act 213, which required the South Carolina Department of Education to establish a statewide MTSS framework and provide training and support. The district office took the lead in the initial exploration of MTSS implementation, given other initiatives underway. The high school then examined the supports already in place for meeting the academic, behavioral, and mental health needs of students. Interviewees said early discussions led to a realization that MTSS for their high school meant, "taking everything you are doing and seeing how it all connects" and then filling in gaps in student supports. The school's MTSS planning involved bringing together different teams, groups, and procedures into a coordinated model to better serve students, with an initial focus on better coordinating academic interventions across the school.

The Present: What Does MTSS Look Like Now?

Leadership: Vision, Teams, Structures, and Processes

District leadership for MTSS includes special education and curriculum administrators. At the high school, the four school administrators, counselors, and lead teachers (who are strategically selected from each department) lead MTSS implementation. However, the school's vision is that everyone takes ownership in the MTSS process. Leadership of MTSS has shifted from a district-driven initiative to a school-driven process over the past four years as school leaders became familiar with MTSS and started making changes to address issues in their school's implementation. School leaders described the importance of staff buy-in, and thus are intentional about being transparent and engaging staff in communication about perceived needs and potential changes to MTSS implementation.

"My staff is the one that has to do it. So we can't just make a bunch of plans and expect them to just do them."

The school's current model for MTSS focuses on academic, behavioral, and mental health support. PBIS is used as a framework for behavioral support, and the school recently began using professional learning communities as a vehicle for teachers to engage in collaborative planning and the analysis of data on student progress. The school created a "Data Room" in 2022-23 and reports that this Data Room has been a huge asset to MTSS implementation. Every student in the school has a magnet with their name on it, as well as visual "tags" that indicate specific student information, such as students who have attendance or behavior plans and those who are English Learners, Gifted and Talented, or have IEPs or 504 plans.

Teachers are asked to go to the Data Room weekly to move students' magnets to a designated space if they are failing and look for past students who may need a check-in. Administrators also visit the Data Room weekly and use it as a tool to familiarize themselves with the status of all students in the school. Once per month

administrators and counselors meet to come up with individual plans for students who are failing multiple subjects.

Student Supports

In the last two years, the high school has implemented a new block schedule that allows for a dedicated 45-minute “Flex Time” period four days per week (see page 4). This time is primarily used for remediation, though some clubs, teams, or organizations use Flex Time to meet. Students are assigned to a specific Flex Time class by the school’s administration and counseling teams based on a priority system that considers a need for special education support, students who failed classes, and AP and Honors students. Teachers can also request that specific students report to them, and assignments can be changed on a daily basis.

The Friday Flex Time is reserved for social, behavioral, and mental health activities organized around “BEAR Time,” which stands for Belonging, Excellence, Achievement, and Respect. Teachers lead 15-minute lessons on one of those four words, and these lessons are the focus of the school’s PBIS implementation. The school revamped its classroom management and PBIS incentive and consequence systems in 2022-23. “Bear Pride” cards are given to students as positive reinforcement for “doing the right things.” They can turn these cards in for various incentives. Interviewees report that there is a consistent schoolwide classroom management system with specific expectations and consequences.

On Wednesdays, there is no Flex Time and students are released 45 minutes early. Buses run on the regular schedule and students without alternative transportation are supervised by non-instructional staff while instructional staff engage in one hour of collaborative planning and data analysis time with their departments. This is in addition to the 85 minutes of individual planning time teachers have every day.

Impacts of MTSS on the School

One impact of MTSS implementation reported by this school is that teachers are having more vertical and collaborative conversations around students and how they can help them. Interviewees report that the collaborative teacher planning time on Wednesdays has allowed teachers to have conversations that they never have had the time for in prior years. This time has been key to helping teachers coordinate in discussing specific students’ needs. Interviewees also reported that the Data Room has been critical to helping build a school culture in which staff see all students as “theirs” and take on responsibility for providing support. Compared to looking at student data in a spreadsheet, the Data Room personalizes students and their needs and has encouraged teachers to initiate informal mentoring of identified failing students, even those who are not in their classes.

“The Data Room has been phenomenal. Our staff loves it. It's really helped us [develop the mindset] that they're *our* kids, not just *my* kids ... all 1100 of them belong to all 107 employees

At the student level, interviewees reported that they have seen a direct impact on students’ motivation to learn as students increasingly recognize that they cannot slip through the cracks and are required to get support during Flex Time. Course failure rates dropped from 7% last year to 4% this year, while state-required End Of Course (EOC) test scores have “increased drastically” over the past two years. The numbers of discipline referrals and fights have also decreased, and the school’s overall culture seems to be improving.

What Challenges Did the School Encounter with MTSS Implementation?

Changing School Culture

Interviewees observed that changing the instructional staff’s perception of remediation is a work in progress. The old-school mentality of “we teach it, students either learn it or don’t” is still evolving towards “we teach it and if they don’t get it, we must make sure that they get it.” School leaders are in the process of articulating a

vision that does not revolve around teaching, testing, then moving on. Rather, they are encouraging more check-ins along the way so staff can intervene by providing additional support to failing students.

MTSS As the Next New Thing

Schools are often the recipients of a consistent stream of new initiatives, which can lead teachers to develop a “this too shall pass” attitude over time. It is a challenge for school leaders to help staff understand the connections between the new initiatives and create trust that they are going to last. This school faced that challenge as it first implemented MTSS, then added in PLCs, and has recently worked on revamping its PBIS structures. Interviewees said that the effort the school went through to create Flex Time in the school’s master schedule—which involved multiple meetings and extensive collaboration with the district, the local career center, and three high schools in a neighboring school district (who also use the career center)—helped convince staff that these changes were important and would be sustained.

Advice for Other Schools

Keep It Simple and Stay Focused

Interviewees spoke of the importance of taking a backwards planning approach to MTSS implementation: identify the end goal, then figure out how to get there. Altering implementation as challenges are encountered is expected, but schools should stay focused and stay the course. Interviewees described MTSS as coming down to ensuring learning for all students. To promote a mindset that everyone is responsible for helping each student be successful, leaders suggest that an easy starting place for any school is to create a Data Room to personalize data and facilitate discussions about particular students’ needs. They point out that schools cannot help students if they do not know them.

Do a Little Bit at a Time

Interviewees reflected that implementing MTSS can seem overwhelming for school leaders and staff. They recommend that schools go slowly and take on the pieces they can manage, given the school context. Their belief is that “model” schools that are doing MTSS very well have been doing it for at least seven years, which suggests the complexity of implementation. This school considers itself to be in the middle of that longer implementation journey and very much in the thick of “experimenting with what works and what doesn’t work for us.” They believe that the MTSS vision takes time to evolve, and steady school leadership is critical to the continuous improvement process.

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Belton-Honea Path High School 2022-23 Daily Bell Schedule



M, T, TH, F
FLEX

WEDNESDAY
RELEASE

1ST BLOCK	8:00 - 9:25
2ND BLOCK	9:30 - 10:55
FLEX	11:00 - 11:45
3RD BLOCK	11:50 - 1:45
1ST LUNCH	11:55 - 12:25
2ND LUNCH	12:30 - 1:00
3RD LUNCH	1:05 - 1:35
4TH BLOCK	1:50 - 3:15
CTC SCHEDULE	
MORNING	8:15-10:40
AFTERNOON	12:30-2:55

1ST BLOCK	8:00 - 9:25
2ND BLOCK	9:30 - 10:55
3RD BLOCK	11:00 - 1:00
1ST LUNCH	11:05 - 11:35
2ND LUNCH	11:40 - 12:10
3RD LUNCH	12:15 - 12:45
4TH BLOCK	1:05 - 2:30

CTC SCHEDULE	
MORNING	8:15-10:40
AFTERNOON	11:45-2:10

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