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Hey everyone, it is Katie Novak, and you're listening to the education Table, a micro podcast where we answer your questions about inclusive education in ten minutes or less. In today's episode, we're diving into the differences between multi tiered systems of support and response to intervention RTI. This is like the Alphabet soup episode. While these frameworks are often used interchangeably, they have very distinct differences that are important for all educators to understand. I will share insights into each approach and then we can discuss how they impact teaching and learning. So let's get started. First, I want to start with a story. Imagine that you're building a snowman. The snowman itself represents the MT part of mtSs.

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I want you to think about the acronym MTSS, put it into fist and snap it in half just as you carefully stack snow to create the base and the middle and the top. The MT part of MTSS involves developing these layers of support that build on top of each other, tier one, tier two, and tier three to address the varying needs of students academically, behaviorally, socially, and emotionally. Each tier of the snowman is built on the one below it. However, constructing a snowman requires a lot more than just like putting these snowballs on top of each other. You need the right conditions and the right materials to be able to do it in the first place. You need a really cold climate, so there is snow and the snow doesn't melt.

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You might need stick for arms and carrots for a nose, and maybe there's a hat and a scarf. That's the SS or the system of support. The SS provides the necessary environment and resources that make building those tiers or that snowman possible. So in our schools, if we're talking about tier one instruction, tier two instruction, tier three instruction, the system of support is strong leadership, high quality instructional materials, family and community engagement, and ongoing professional development. Without these supports, the snowman or the MT is not going to stand, it's not going to be strong. So we're going to dive into the research and relationship between RTI and mtSs, and then we're going to talk about some concrete strategies for nurturing that system. So, as I shared, MTSs can be broken into two parts, the MT part for multi tiered and the SS part.

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The MT part is really related to RTI because it's focused on tiered supports, whereas the SS is the broader strategies and systems work for ensuring that we can create it. So response to intervention focuses primarily on providing services, supports, and interventions for students who are at risk academically. It's a three tiered system. So the idea of RTI was that every single student, every single one is educated together in this tier one with universal instruction. All students are educated in tier one. And then there are some students who will need additional support, and we use data to determine who is also going to need that targeted support. And then we know that there are some students who are going to need really intensive intervention because of significant support needs.

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So RTI, it really emphasizes the importance of that high quality tier one instruction with additional support as needed. And within RTI, students can move and get additional support when they need it, and then they're back in tier one. And so that is RTI, which is a multi tiered system. PBIS is also multi tiered. But when we talk about the real system of support of mtSs, how is that different? MTSS encompasses RTI, but it goes beyond that because it also addresses this system wide shift. Like we talked about, really strong leadership and working with the community and families and ensuring that teachers have really ongoing high quality professional support. And MTSS focuses on academics, behavior, and emotional supports to ensure that we're addressing really all of the different barriers that could negatively impact students and educators.

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Now, the Massachusetts MTSS blueprint, which I had the opportunity to help develop, emphasizes three key system drivers that we need for that system of support. The first are the leadership drivers, which is all about building that culture for serving all students, shared responsibility, resource allocation, like staffing and scheduling, and family engagement. Those are all things we need if we're going to do this work well. There's also competency drivers, which is about getting high quality staff, ongoing professional development, mentoring, co planning, educator evaluation. We need to build collective efficacy in our educators to be successful in a tiered system. And lastly, we have our implementation drivers. And this is really about, do we have evidence based practices? Do we have the culture of really rich database decision making? Do we have standards based instruction? Do we have high quality materials?

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Do we have really authentic assessments? Right. Are all the things that we need in this system. So essentially, we're trying to create a system that allows us to provide tiered supports to students when they need it. And to do that, we have to kind of work from that outside in, right? Really strong leadership, really great professional development, and really great resources. So let's dive into some concrete strategies that can help us to foster this system. Now, first, we have to make sure that we're integrating academic, behavioral, and social emotional supports. It is essential that we're talking about the whole child. We have to be coherent about the fact that there are lots of barriers that are preventing students from learning.

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And using the lens of inclusive practice means that if we're going to include all students, then we have to recognize barriers throughout the system. And we need to use frameworks like universal design for learning, differentiated instruction, social emotional learning, restorative practices. But those are not the goals. Your goal is not to implement UDL. Your goal is not restorative practices. Those are change ideas. Those are the actions that we're taking. They're the frameworks we're applying. Because our goal is all students will be successful in classrooms together when we get the conditions right. Our goal is that all students have their needs met. Our goal is that teachers feel prepared to do that work.

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And when we take a holistic approach, we ensure that all of students needs are considered and that leads to a much more comprehensive system where it doesn't feel like we have all these silos. Second, we have to make sure that we're implementing data systems. We need to be focused on data collection and analysis all of the time. And regularly collecting data means that we're looking at lots of different types of data. We're using the street data, we're using perception data. We want to make sure that we're looking at how students are learning. We want to look attendance. We want to talk to kids about their sense of belonging. We want to get into classrooms, but we need to use lots of different forms of data to inform the decisions that we're making about every single thing.

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So we cannot have a really high quality, multi tiered system if we don't have a really great culture of looking at data and using data to make decisions. Because when we are having a positive impact, we want to continue what we're doing. And when we're not having a positive impact yet, we need to try something else. We need to eliminate barriers. Now, the last is the power of collective efficacy, shared responsibility, and leadership. So we're going to focus on the importance of collaborative leadership. One of the most important aspects of MTSs is this idea of shared responsibility. We work together to meet the needs of all students, and we have to shift the conversation from these students aren't successful to we as a system don't have what we need yet to help these students be successful.

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And that requires a culture of collaboration with educators and administrators and families that are working together to figure out those conditions. So we have to encourage the shared responsibility through regular communication and teamwork and co planning and consult. And by working together, we can create the conditions or the system that really helps all students to thrive. So, in summary, while RTI focuses on providing targeted academic interventions, MTSS offers a much more comprehensive and proactive and holistic approach that addresses all student needs. By implementing mtSs, schools and districts can create much more inclusive, much more supportive environments for all learners, for all families, for all of educators. So again, now you know the difference between MTSs and RTI. Thank you so much for joining me at the education table.

## **09:12**

Be sure to check out the show notes for more resources on MTSs and RTI, and click subscribe so that you get notified when we have more episodes. Until next time onward.