Ninth-Grade On Track System Improvement Guide

For Building and District Leaders

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Introduction

Keeping ninth-graders on track to graduate is a high-leverage success strategy that states and districts across the country are using to ensure all students graduate from high school on time with their peers. In Washington state, many school systems are adopting evidence-based practices to support students' transition into high school and throughout their freshman year. Successful schools recognize that most students struggle with this transition and are intentional about ensuring every ninth-grader has strong relationships with trusted adults who understand their strengths and challenges and are equipped to respond skillfully and effectively.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) provides schools with statistics on the Ninth Grade on Track indicator, which measures the rate of credits students earned relative to credits they attempted in ninth grade. As district and building leaders, you are uniquely positioned to use these data to drive positive action, such as identifying struggling students before they fall off track and providing a welcoming learning community and the academic and social supports necessary to keep them on the path to graduation and adult success.

This guide may be used by individual leaders but will most benefit a team of district, building staff members, and community members charged with developing and carrying out plans for improvement. To enrich the data review and planning process, consider including administrators, school counselors, student support staff, teachers, students, families, and community organization staff members on your team.

The four sections of this guide are organized sequentially. The first two sections build understanding of the rationale for prioritizing supports for ninth-graders and of each district's Ninth Grade on Track statistics. The third and fourth sections ask team members to assess strengths and areas for growth, and to develop goals and strategies for improvement. After completing all four sections of the guide, the team will have answered key focus questions and developed an informed action plan.

USING THE GUIDE

This guide is designed to help you and key stakeholders use your district's Washington School Improvement Framework (WSIF) data to:

- Understand and interpret Ninth Grade on Track statistics for your district and for the state.
- Engage in a collaborative self-assessment of your strengths and challenges in this area.
- Develop concrete plans to strengthen supports for ninth graders in your district.

SECTION 1
Why Ninth Grade?

Focus Question: What are the benefits of and rationale for strengthening supports for ninth-graders in Washington?

SECTION 2
Understanding Your Data

Focus Question: What is the status of ninth-grade success in our district?

SECTION 3
Self-Assessment

Focus Question: What are areas of strength and barriers to improving supports for ninth-graders in our district?

SECTION 4
Action Steps

Focus Question: What will we do over the next one to three years to strengthen comprehensive and targeted supports for ninth-graders?

Why Ninth Grade?

OBJECTIVE

- Understand the rationale for strengthening supports for ninth-graders in Washington.

FOCUS QUESTION

- What are the benefits of and rationale for strengthening supports for ninth-graders?

DIRECTIONS

- Read the Ninth Grade on Track research summary below.
- Respond to the discussion questions at the end of the section.

Ensuring ninth-graders are on track to graduation is a leading improvement strategy and a key performance indicator in Washington state.

Ninth Grade On Track is one of OSPI's measures for school improvement, which are designed to advance the state's vision of closing achievement and opportunity gaps and graduating all students prepared for postsecondary pathways, careers, and civic engagement. Ninth Grade On Track is included in **Washington's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)** plan as a measure of school quality and student success at the high school level. Strategies to strengthen key transition points in students' education, such as ninth grade, are promoted in the Washington State Board of Education's **strategic plan** and in the Washington Student Achievement Council's (WSAC) 10-year **roadmap** to ensure underrepresented students have access to college opportunities. *In Washington, Ninth Grade On Track is measured as the rate of ninth-grade course failure, calculated as the number of course credits first time ninth-graders attempt versus the number of credits earned.*

Ninth grade is a vulnerable transition point for students and a time when many fall off the graduation path.

The first year of high school brings a lot of changes. Freshmen find themselves in an unfamiliar and often much larger school, with new teachers and peers and challenging academic expectations and social pressures. Many students fall behind, even those who did well in middle school. Students are also going through a major phase of physiological, neurological, and social development that can make it difficult for them to prioritize academic performance. Research in urban districts suggests that as many as 40 percent of students fail to get promoted from the ninth to tenth grade on time, and fewer than 20 percent of those students recover from failure and go on to graduate.[1]

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[1] Kemple, Herlihy, and Smith (2005); Allensworth and Easton (2005); Neild and Balfanz (2006b)

Ninth Grade on Track is a nationally validated indicator of student success and is a stronger predictor of high school graduation than students' background or test scores.

Numerous studies point to the ninth-grade transition as a high-leverage intervention point for improving student engagement and persistence in high school.[2] Researchers at the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (CCSR) developed the on-track indicator to help school and district leaders know whether ninth-graders are making adequate progress to graduation. The CCSR indicator identifies students as on track if they have enough credits to be promoted to tenth grade and earned no more than one semester F in a core academic course. Rigorous studies have found students' on-track status to be a stronger predictor of high school graduation than their race/ethnicity, level of poverty, or test scores. Students who end ninth grade on track are almost four times more likely to graduate from high school than their peers who are off track. Students who earn B grades are 80% more likely to complete college.[3] High school graduates are more likely to enroll in college, be employed, be healthy, and make positive contributions in their communities and to society as a whole. They make at least $500,000 more in lifetime earnings compared to students who drop out and are three times less likely to live in poverty. Moving just one student from dropout to high school graduate saves U.S. taxpayers $200,000 in lost tax revenue and social service spending. This would lead to $45 billion in annual savings if we decreased the number of high school dropouts by 50 percent in a single graduating class.[4] In Washington, increasing the graduation rate to 90 percent would produce $130 million in additional income, increasing the tax base, lowering health care costs, and creating more wealth and jobs across the state.[5]

Students can be identified as at risk of falling off the graduation path in middle school and throughout high school by using early warning indicators.

A Ninth Grade On Track measure is a useful indicator of how well supports for ninth-graders are working. It can also identify individual students who may need additional support. Fortunately, educators do not have to wait until partway through ninth grade to identify students at risk of dropping out of high school. Researchers at the Johns Hopkins University Everyone Graduates Center (EGC) found that school and district teams can identify half of future dropouts as early as sixth grade by monitoring readily available data on attendance, behavior, and course performance.[6] These data have come to be known as the ABCs of dropout prevention and the measures are often called "early warning" indicators.

EGC researchers published a set of common thresholds (or cutpoints) for indicators in each of these areas, which were validated across numerous district- and state-level analyses.[7] Other research suggests that local education agencies (LEAs) are better served by analyzing their local data, because the most accurate indicators vary across districts and by grade level.[8] A study of six districts in southern King County in Washington, for example, examined the predictive power of early warning indicators that had been validated in one of the districts (Seattle Public Schools) and adopted by the other five. The study found that the indicators were unable to identify many future dropouts, especially among newcomer English learner students, highlighting the importance of locally validated indicators and thresholds that can better reflect each individual district's student population.[9] Predictive power aside, educators and community members may also be more accepting of identification systems based on locally validated indicators.

[2] Allensworth and Easton (2005; 2007); Neild and Balfanz (2006a; 2006b). [3] Roderick, Kelley-Kemple, Johnson, and Beechum (2014). *https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/On-Track%20Validation%20RS.pdf* [4] *http://guidebook.americaspromise.org/section/demonstrating-the-benefits-of-high-school-completion* [5] *http://impact.all4ed.org/Infographics/State/WA-GradEffect-Infographic-FINAL.PDF* [6] Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Balfanz, Wang, & Byrnes, 2010. [7] Mac Iver and Mac Iver, 2009, *https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED539776.pdf* [8] Stuit, O'Cummings, Norbury, Heppen, Dhillon, Lindsay, and Zhu (2016). See also a policy brief summarizing the research at *https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midwest/pdf/REL_2016207.pdf* [9] Deussen, Hanson, and Bisht (2017).

Implementing structural changes and targeted academic and social supports in ninth grade can put more students on the graduation path.

Strategies that reduce dropout rates in middle schools and high schools and improve high school graduation rates have been research extensively. **Preventing Dropout in Secondary Schools**, a 2017 practice guide from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) makes the following recommendations:

1. Monitor student progress and proactively intervene when students show early signs of attendance, behavior, or academic problems.

2. Provide intensive, individualized support to students who have fallen off track and face significant challenges to success.

3. Engage students by offering curricula and programs that connect schoolwork with college and career success and that improve students' capacity to manage challenges in and out of school.

4. Create small, personalized learning communities to facilitate monitoring and support, especially for schools with many at-risk students.

These recommendations, based on a research review using What Works Clearinghouse evidence standards, encompass a wide range of practices, including early warning systems, multi-tiered systems of supports, tutoring, mentoring, individual case-management, project-based learning, career and college exploration, accelerated learning, social-emotional learning, small learning communities, grade-level teams, outreach to middle schools, and summer bridge programs.

Another research review cautions against taking an uncoordinated programmatic approach, advocating instead for a systemic approach to supporting ninth-grade transition (Christie & Zinth, 2008).[10] Washington State's Project Graduation was cited in this review as a leading example of mutually reinforcing approaches and policies, including:

- A GEAR UP program to identify seventh- and eighth-grade students needing help
- A statewide goal of increasing the number of students taking Algebra I in eighth grade
- A four- to six-week summer program for identified incoming high school students
- Double doses of math and reading/literacy for identified students
- Monitoring student progress through meaningful advisory programs, such as a designated "advocate" for every family
- Strong, high-quality teachers and lower teacher-student ratios in ninth grade
- Common planning time for all ninth-grade teachers
- Transition classes for English and mathematics using a block-schedule structure
- Career and technical education courses in ninth grade using a block-schedule structure

Other recommendations in the Christie and Zinth research review include allocating sufficient resources to support and oversee ninth-grade transition, supporting programs that create positive peer networks for students, educating families about the importance of the ninth-grade transition, and ensuring that traditionally underserved students participate early and often in activities that enhance academic success and college awareness.

While much is known about strategies and policies to improve ninth-grade success, very little is known about how to implement them well and how to sustain them over time. The next section of this guide offers data analytics to help your team understand the ninth-grade challenges in your district and a framework for building school and district capacity to address them.

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[10] Kathy Christie and Kyle Zinth. Ensuring Successful Student Transitions from the Middle Grades to High School. *http://www.adlit.org/article/32116/*

REFLECTION

Focusing questions for further discussion

1. Who in your district could use the information provided in this section? How would they use it?

2. Who are the key stakeholders in your district and community currently involved in supporting high school freshmen and students transitioning into ninth grade? Who should be part of the team in your district to work on assessing and strengthening these supports?

Understanding Your Data

OBJECTIVES

- Understand basic information about your district's Ninth Grade on Track status.
- Explore data tools and processes for keeping students on track to graduation.
- Identify additional questions and information needed.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

- What is the status of ninth-grade credit attainment in our district?
- What data tools and processes can we implement and/or improve to keep students on the graduation path?

DIRECTIONS

- Access and review your Washington School Improvement Framework (WSIF) data per directions below and respond to the questions about your schools' status on the Ninth Grade on Track indicator.
- Review the information about early warning systems and multi-tiered systems of support and respond to the related discussion questions.
- Discuss responses with your data team and/or ninth-grade success team, staff, and stakeholders.

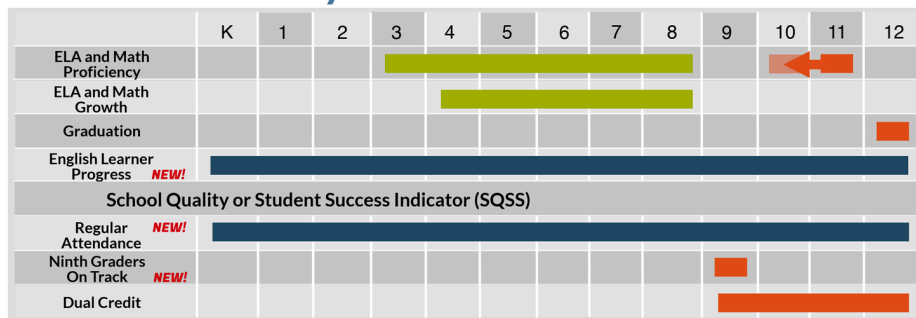## What are the available sources of Ninth Grade on Track data?

Released in March 2018, the WSIF identifies how schools can improve the education of all students. The framework includes schools' regular attendance, graduation, and proficiency, as well as English learner progress, dual credit completion, and Ninth Grade on Track.

Although they allow for comparison of schools and can function as a helpful snapshot, WSIF's indicators are just the starting point for understanding the strengths and weaknesses of a school or district. OSPI encourages your team to access your own school- and district-level data to gain a better understanding of challenges and strengths in your local context.

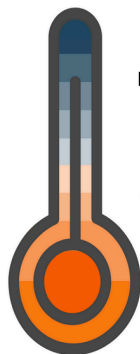# Washington School Improvement Framework: Highlights & Key Updates

The WA School Improvement Framework includes **each student group individually**, creating a holistic vision of a school through two lenses: the performance of the all students group and that of their student group populations.

How are your schools measured?

Coming Updates!
High School ELA and Math Assessments will be moving from 11th grade to 10th grade in 2018.

Science will be included after the new Washington Comprehensive Assessment of Science test has been given.

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
ELA and Math Proficiency				▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬		←		
ELA and Math Growth					▬	▬	▬	▬	▬				
Graduation												▬	
English Learner Progress *NEW!*	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	
School Quality or Student Success Indicator (SQSS)													
Regular Attendance *NEW!*	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	
Ninth Graders On Track *NEW!*										▬			
Dual Credit										▬	▬	▬	

New Definitions

English Learner Progress
% of students making adequate progress to transition out of program within six years

Regular Attendance
% of students attending 90% or more school days

9th Graders On Track
% of first time 9th graders who earned all credits attempted

Measures Combine into Overall Score

Each indicator noted above is mapped to a 1-10 score. These scores are combined based on the grade span of the school, creating the Framework.

The lowest performing 5% of school scores establish a support threshold - any school under the threshold will be identified for comprehensive support, and any school with a student group under the threshold will be identified for targeted support.

Student Privacy - Minimum Number

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3

To protect student privacy, a minimum number of students is required so no one student can be identified. For the Framework, the minimum number of students is 20 students over three years.
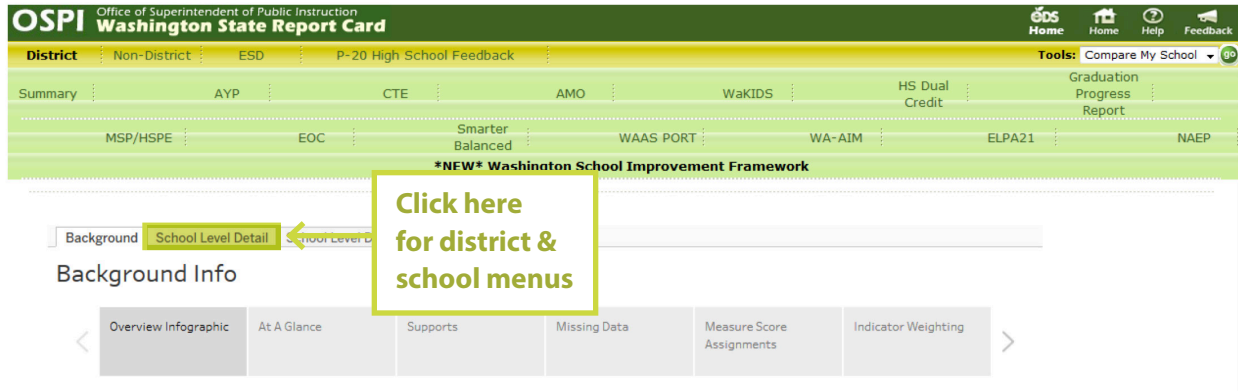
For more information about the Framework, visit http://www.k12.wa.us/ESSA
For data related inquiries, email us at AccountabilityData@k12.wa.us
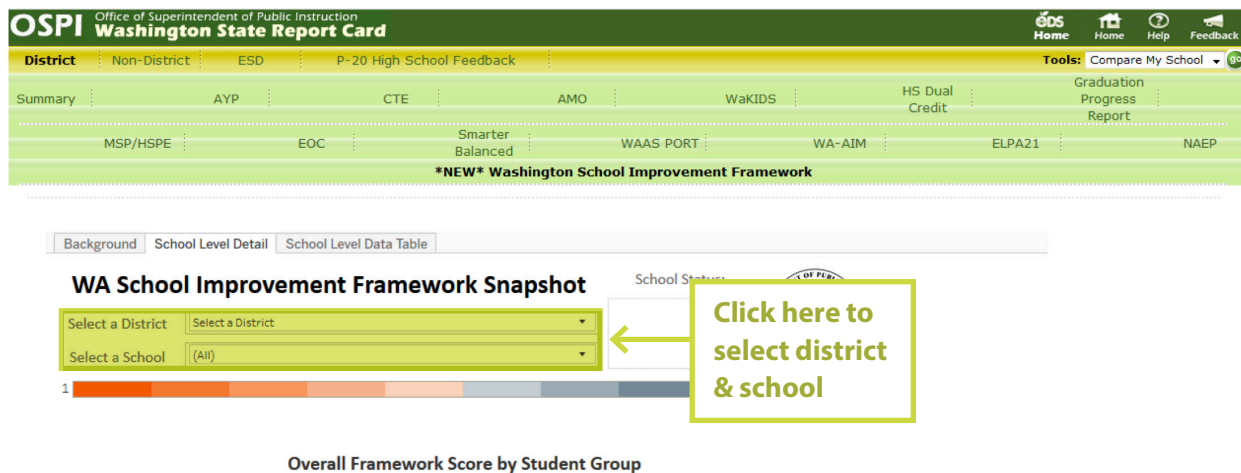
Accessing and discussing your Ninth Grade on Track data using the Washington School Improvement Framework (WSIF) tool

STEP 1: Click on the WSIF link *Washington School Improvement Framework (WSIF)*

STEP 2: Select "School Level Detail" tab (see arrow on screenshot)

STEP 3: Select your district and the high school in your district you want to view first

Measures by Student Group

	All Students	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Asian	Black/African American	Hispanic/Latinx of any race(s)	Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	Two or More Races	White	English Learners	Low Income	Students with Disabilities
ELA Proficiency Rate	62.5%		65.0%	46.1%	54.5%			69.9%	22.0%	49.1%	26.4%
Math Proficiency Rate											
ELA Median SGP											
Math Median SGP											
Graduation Rate	85.9%		90.1%	83.4%	75.5%			88.2%	76.3%	80.5%	73.2%
EL Progress Rate*	78.3%										
Regular Attendance Rate	79.9%		89.2%	71.7%	72.7%		80.9%	82.9%	83.8%	74.1%	68.8%
Ninth Grade On Track Rate	81.2%		93.0%	59.1%			85.2%	93.0%	71.1%	63.4%	55.5%
Dual Credit Rate	73.6%		75.2%	62.1%	70.1%		76.2%	80.8%	52.1%	64.8%	41.3%

STEP 5: Record your school's Ninth Grade on Track rate in the table provided

School 1 name _____

	All students	AI/AN	Asian	BLK/ AA	Hisp/ Latx	Hawaiian Pac Isl	2+ Race	White	Engl. learn	Low income	Students disabl
Ninth Grade on Track rate											

Repeat Steps 3-5 to retrieve data for additional high schools in your district if necessary

School 2 name _____

	All students	AI/AN	Asian	BLK/ AA	Hisp/ Latx	Hawaiian Pac Isl	2+ Race	White	Engl. learn	Low income	Students disabl
Ninth Grade on Track rate											

School 3 name _____

	All students	AI/AN	Asian	BLK/ AA	Hisp/ Latx	Hawaiian Pac Isl	2+ Race	White	Engl. learn	Low income	Students disabl
Ninth Grade on Track rate											

Understanding your data

1. What percentage of all students are on track to graduate in ninth grade in each school? Which school has the highest percentage? Which school has the lowest percentage?

2. Which student groups have low Ninth Grade on Track rates? Does this vary by school?

3. Which student groups have high on-track rates? Does this vary by school?

Reflecting on your data

1. Are you surprised by your school's Ninth Grade on Track rates?

2. What might explain the differences in Ninth Grade on Track rates across schools?
   - *Consider: organizational features (size, scheduling, staffing); curriculum/instruction; student supports; counseling/guidance; student and community characteristics*

3. What might explain the gaps among student groups in Ninth Grade on Track rates? In what ways are you addressing these gaps? What needs more attention?

4. Are any student groups in your school not represented in the data provided here? What would you expect the Ninth Grade on Track rates to be for these non-represented groups—higher or lower than the average for all students?
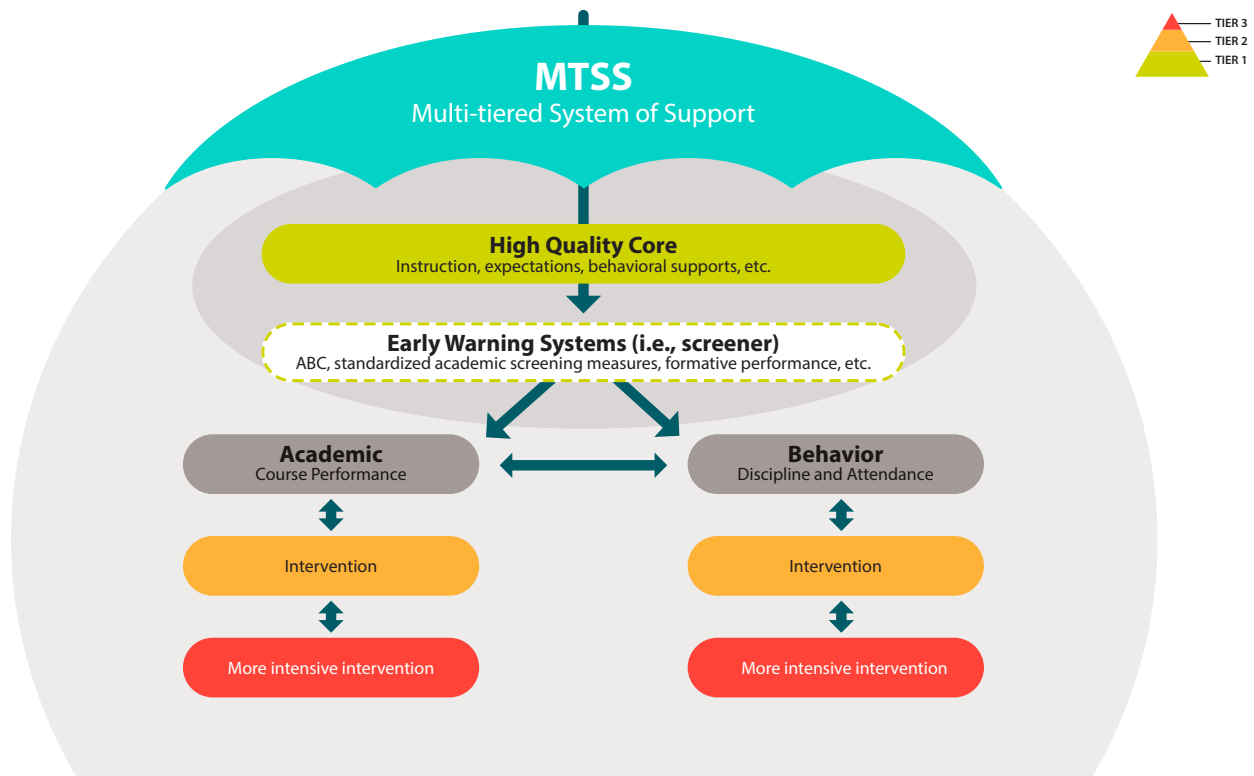
Tools and processes for keeping students on track to graduation[11]

The following information describes leading approaches to putting ninth-graders (and other middle and high school students) on the path to high school graduation and adult success. Please review the information and discuss your response to the question at the end of the section.

Overview

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and *early warning systems (EWS)* are becoming standard practice for secondary education. Although researchers sometimes treat MTSS and EWS as distinct approaches, in practice they are interdependent. An EWS is a system of data-based indicators that have been validated to predict student outcomes related to high school graduation. The system promotes action on the part of the EWS team—prompted by the indicators—to help students get back on track, stay on track, be promoted to each subsequent grade, and ultimately graduate.

Meanwhile, an MTSS embeds this screening process within a broad system of supports and interventions that school and district teams activate to keep all students on track to graduation.

An MTSS with an embedded EWS has four components: indicators and reports, teaming, interventions, and program tracking and evaluation. Each component is described in the rest of the section.

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[11] See OSPI "9th Graders on Track" web pages for a robust set of resources to support districts in improving ninth grade on track outcomes: *http://www.k12.wa.us/9thGrade/GettingStarted.aspx | http://www.k12.wa.us/9thGrade/BestPractices.aspx | http://www.k12.wa.us/MTSS/default. aspx*

Indicators and reports

As described earlier, EWS indicators are typically drawn from attendance, behavior, and course performance data, often referred to as the ABCs of dropout prevention. The table below shows common thresholds for identifying students who are on-track, falling off-track, or off-track to graduation. These thresholds have been validated in national research.[12] While districts and schools can use these thresholds, they are encouraged to develop valid indicators based on analysis of their local data.

THRESHOLD	ATTENDANCE (AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE IN PERCENT)		BEHAVIOR (OFFICE REFERRALS)		BEHAVIOR (SUSPENSIONS)		ACADEMICS	
	Quarter	Full Year	Quarter	Full Year	Quarter	Full Year	Math and English	Core Courses
OFF TRACK	9 days	Less than 90% attendance rate	2	6	1	2	Report card grade of F	Report card grade of F
SLIDING	5-8 days	90%-94% attendance rate	1	3-5	0	0-1	Report card grade of D	Report card grade of D
ON TRACK TO GRADUATION	4 days or fewer	95% or better attendance rate	0	0-2	0	0-1	Report card grade of A, B, or C	Report card grade of A, B, or C

Source: Mac Iver and Mac Iver, 2009, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED539776.pdf; Portraits of Change, 2017, http://www.attendanceworks.org/portraits-of-change/

Teams that use these indicators to identify and support students typically receive reports generated by district or school administrators that code students based on a "traffic light" system: green = on track, yellow = sliding off track, and red = off track.

On the next page is a sample of a student-level report that teams use on a routine basis (ideally, weekly or biweekly) to identify which students to focus on for either support or positive recognition. A full report for a freshman student might contain additional indicators, such as behavior incidences and the number of courses the student is currently failing.

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[12] Mac Iver and Mac Iver, 2009, *https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED539776.pdf*; Portraits of Change, 2017, *http://www.attendanceworks.org/portraits-of-change/*

First Name on track status End of Year	Grade	Attendance Rate Cycle 3	Days Absent YTD	Attendance Rate Current	Movement on/off track Attendance	Reading Grade Cycle 3	Reading Grade Current	movement on/off track Reading	Writing Grade Cycle 3	Writing Grade Current	movement on/off track Writing	Math Grade Cycle 3	Math Grade Current	movement on/off track Math
126 Alexander	3	99%	5	97%	—	C+	C+	—	C	C+	—	B-	B-	—
127 Branden	6	86%	25	86%	—	F	C-	↑	F	D	↑	C	C+	—
128 Amesha	5	96%	9	95%	↓	D	B-	↑	C	B	—	F	A+	↑
129 Naziyah	4	75%	50	73%	—	F	D	↑	C-	C-	—	D	D	—
130 Aydiya	6	96%	8	96%	—	C-	C	—	B-	C-	—	B+	A+	↑
131 Qu-ran	8	90%	21	88%	↓	D	C+	↑	C-	C	—	C+	B-	—
132 Ny'Asia	4	82%	19	82%	—	C-	B-	—	B-	B	—	C	B	—
133 Keira	4	92%	15	92%	—	C-	C+	—	C-	B-	—	C	B	—
134 Jaquan	8	97%	4	98%	—	C	B-	—	C-	C-	—	C	B+	—
135 Zariah	5	86%	13	91%	↑	F	F	—	C-	D	↓	C-	C-	—
136 Jaqulle	3	89%	16	88%	—	F	C+	↑	D	C	↑	C	B-	—
137 Nayad	8	99%	5	97%	—	D	C	↑	D	C-	↑	B+	C-	—
138 Tanisha	3	90%	21	89%	↓	C	D	↓	D	D	—	B-	B-	—
139 Jaziah	6	96%	6	97%	—	B	B	—	C	C	—	C	A-	↑
140 Diamond	5	94%	8	96%	↑	A-	A	—	A-	B	↓	B	B+	—
141 Al-Shanae	7	98%	11	94%	↓	C+	C+	—	C-	C-	—	B	A-	↑
142 Yusuf	5	86%	29	84%	—	C	C	—	C	C	—	C-	C-	—
143 Destiny	7	91%	19	90%	—	B-	B-	—	C	B-	—	D	D	—
144 Aniyah	4	74%	22.5	79%	—	B	A	↑	A-	A	—	C	B	—
145 Shaquanna	8	100%	0	100%	—	A	A-	—	A+	A+	—	C-	C-	—
146 Briana	3	78%	38	79%	—	C	C+	—	C-	C-	—	C-	B-	—
147 Kiyonah	3	91%	17	91%	—	C+	C-	—	D	F	↓	B-	B	—
148 Daja	7	98%	6	97%	—	A-	A	—	A-	B	↓	C	B	—
149 Rasheed	7	88%	27	85%	—	C-	C-	—	C	C	—	C	C+	—
150 Serena	5	88%	5	93%	↑		D			C-			B-	
151 Samijah	3	85%	24	87%	—	A-	B+	↓	B	B+	—	B+	B+	—
152 Jaevon	4	86%	28	85%	—	A-	A-	—	C	B	—	A-	A-	—
153 Nalani	3	98%	2	98%	—	B+	B	—	B	B+	—	A	B+	↓
154 Lee	4	96%	10	95%	↓	B-	B-	—	B	C-	—	B	C+	—
155 Quamae	3	96%	11	94%	↓	A-	B	↓	B	B+	—	A	B+	↓
156 Manusha	8	96%	7	96%	—	A-	A-	—				B-	A	↑
157 Kalifar	5	98%	3	98%	—	B+	B+	—	C+	B-	—	B-	A	↑

EWS reporting systems also typically have the capacity to produce aggregate reports that school leaders or school improvement teams can use to guide decisionmaking on a quarterly, semester, or annual basis.

Teaming

Ninth-grade success teams are the heart of an MTSS/EWS. Districts may find it easiest to form two teams—a core team that meets weekly or biweekly to discuss individual students and the supports they need, and a larger leadership team that meets monthly or quarterly to look at aggregated student data and manages schoolwide and districtwide supports. The core team is made up of administrators, counselors, data specialists, and instructional and student support staff. The larger leadership or school improvement team includes core team members plus a broader set of specialists and stakeholders. The boxes below describe typical team composition and roles.

Team Composition

Core Members

- IT staff
- School team leader
- District-level leader
- Program coordinator
- School counselor

Representatives from different groups

- Content area teachers
- Special education
- ELL instructors
- Equity coordinators
- Parent organizations
- Student organizations
- On-track coordinator
- Graduation specialist

For teams that manage individual student data, the following responsibilities can be helpful for running the meeting efficiently and facilitating the discussion of at least three students in a one-hour meeting.

Team Roles

- **Team facilitator:** Sets agenda and leads the team through the agenda
- **Timekeeper:** Monitors the time for each agenda item and serves as the team facilitator
- **Minutes recorder:** Takes notes and documents the decisions made
- **Data manager:** Gathers, organizes, and examines data prior to the meeting, pulls any additional data needed, and anticipates questions or hypotheses
- **Administrator:** Provides approval for decisions and provides school-level commitment

In a one-hour meeting, protocols can be used to keep the team on target to discuss three students, identify the root cause of why each student is struggling in the indicator(s) they are flagged in, and identify an appropriate intervention or support. The general protocol for discussing each student should be:

Team Meeting Protocol

- **Identify the student and indicator(s) they are flagged in. These students can be identified prior to the meeting to save time. This should take no longer than 1–2 minutes.**
- **Provide background information to help identify the root cause of why the student may be struggling. It can be helpful to include teacher, parent, and student input to identify the main issues the student is facing. If the students are identified prior to the meeting, some of this information can also be gathered ahead of time. This should take no longer than 2–3 minutes.**
- **Discuss intervention options based on the root cause of why a student is struggling on a given indicator. Teams can develop a resource map of interventions that correlate to each indicator at the beginning of the school year. The resource map can then be referenced during the meeting to see what is available. Once an intervention is identified assign the most responsible person (MRP) to ensure it is implemented and monitored.**
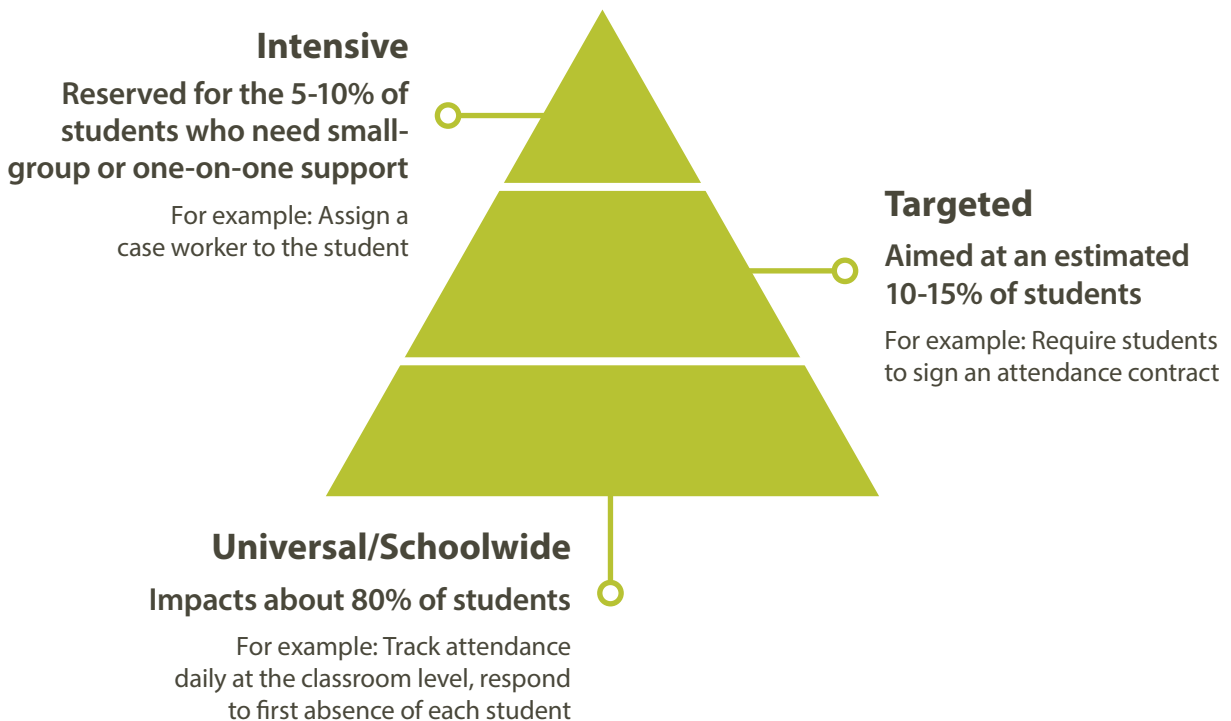
The **Freshman On-Track Toolkit**, available through the University of Chicago's Network for College Success, is an excellent resource that includes tools and videos on facilitating data-driven ninth-grade success team meetings. For example, watch this video **"Success Team in Action: Hancock High School"** which demonstrates norms and practices of effective team meetings.

Interventions

Teams must be equipped with a range of academic and behavioral interventions they can use to support students who show signs of falling off the graduation path. Current best practice is for teams to start each school year with a resource map of available supports and interventions.

To create the map, district and school leaders convene at the end of the school year or over the summer to catalog existing interventions, assess gaps, and develop new approaches and programs as needed. This team catalogs supports and interventions according to the issue(s) and indicators they are meant to address (e.g., attendance, behavior, or course performance) and whether they are meant as measures to prevent on-track students from disengaging (Tier 1), as targeted supports for groups of students falling off track (Tier 2), or as intensive interventions for students who are off track and struggling with multiple barriers to success (Tier 3). When designing your map, keep in mind that a few focused interventions that are effective are more powerful than many that aren't effective. Aim for highest impact, lowest effort where possible. See **A Practitioners Guide to Implementing Early Warning Systems** for more details. The figure on the next page provides examples of tools leaders can use to support the cataloging and mapping process. For a focus on mapping non-academic supports, see the **University of Maryland Center for School Mental Health resource mapping guide** for schools and districts.

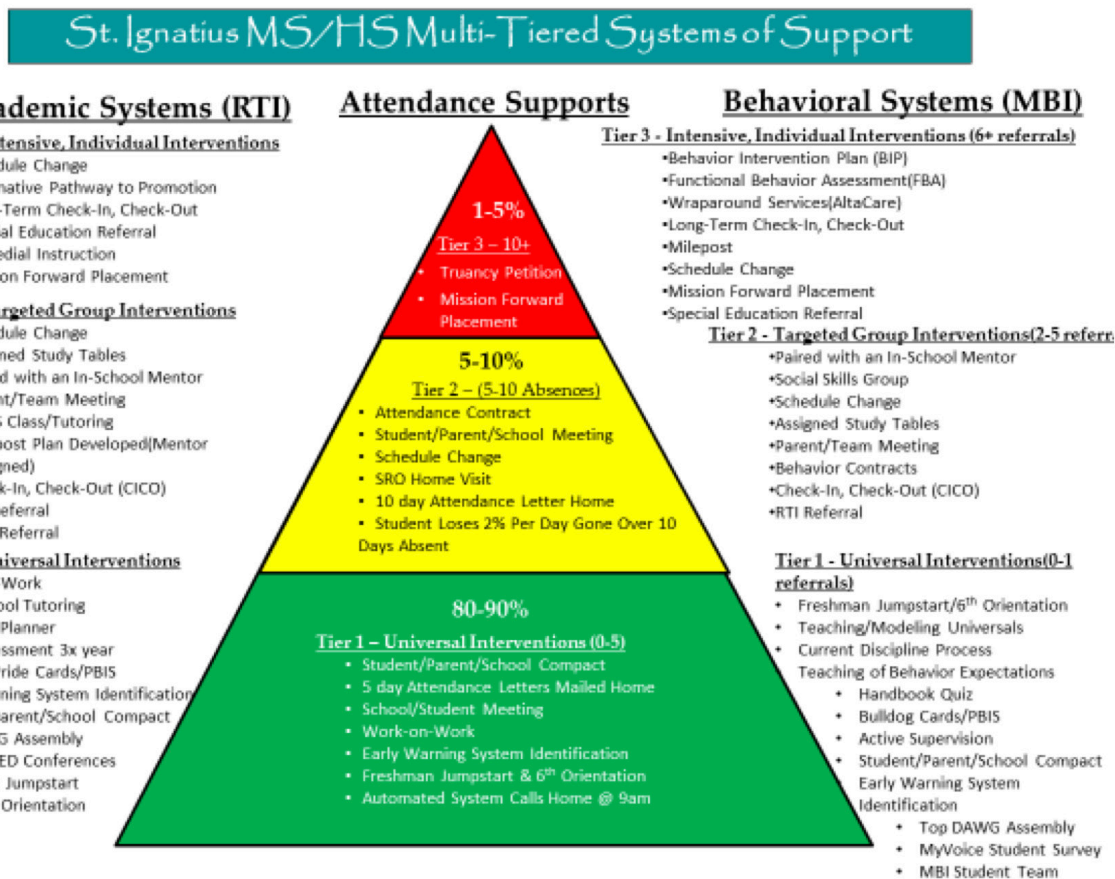## A Multi-Tiered Approach: Prevention and Intervention

Intensive

Reserved for the 5-10% of students who need small-group or one-on-one support

For example: Assign a case worker to the student

Targeted

Aimed at an estimated 10-15% of students

For example: Require students to sign an attendance contract

Universal/Schoolwide

Impacts about 80% of students

For example: Track attendance daily at the classroom level, respond to first absence of each student

Cataloging Interventions: Indicators, Capacity, and Tiers

ATTENDANCE			
INTERVENTION NAME	**CONTACT PERSON**	**STUDENT CAPACITY**	**RTI TIER**
Check & Connect	Mr. Bob	Max 2	3
Twelve Together			2
Reconnecting Youth			2
BEHAVIOR			
INTERVENTION NAME	**CONTACT PERSON**	**STUDENT CAPACITY**	**RTI TIER**
Check & Connect	Mr. Bob		3
COURSE PERFORMANCE			
INTERVENTION NAME	**CONTACT PERSON**	**STUDENT CAPACITY**	**RTI TIER**
Check & Connect			3
Credit Recovery	Principal Smith	64	1
Twelve Together			2
Reconnecting Youth			2
Homework Club			2

Results of the intervention mapping process will look different in every district and school depending on the specific nature of student needs and available resources. The following example shows how leaders from St. Ignatius Middle/High School in Montana map their MTSS to ensure their grade-level data teams are literally "on the same page" about the interventions and supports available for students. They revise this map every year to address changing needs. The school's strong MTSS contributed to a 12 percentage point increase in graduation rates over a three-year period, from 77 percent in 2014 to 89 percent in 2016.

Resource Map Example

St. Ignatius MS/HS Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

Academic Systems (RTI)

Tier 3 - Intensive, Individual Interventions
- Schedule Change
- Alternative Pathway to Promotion
- Long-Term Check-In, Check-Out
- Special Education Referral
- Remedial Instruction
- Mission Forward Placement

Tier 2 - Targeted Group Interventions
- Schedule Change
- Assigned Study Tables
- Paired with an In-School Mentor
- Parent/Team Meeting
- SEMS Class/Tutoring
- Milepost Plan Developed(Mentor Assigned)
- Check-In, Check-Out (CICO)
- RTI Referral
- Title Referral

Tier 1 - Universal Interventions
- Work-On-Work
- After School Tutoring
- Required Planner
- MAP Assessment 3x year
- Bulldog Pride Cards/PBIS
- Early Warning System Identification
- Student/Parent/School Compact
- Top DAWG Assembly
- Student LED Conferences
- Freshman Jumpstart & 6th Orientation

Attendance Supports

1-5%

Tier 3 – 10+
- Truancy Petition
- Mission Forward Placement

5-10%

Tier 2 – (5-10 Absences)
- Attendance Contract
- Student/Parent/School Meeting
- Schedule Change
- SRO Home Visit
- 10 day Attendance Letter Home
- Student Loses 2% Per Day Gone Over 10 Days Absent

80-90%

Tier 1 – Universal Interventions (0-5)
- Student/Parent/School Compact
- 5 day Attendance Letters Mailed Home
- School/Student Meeting
- Work-on-Work
- Early Warning System Identification
- Freshman Jumpstart & 6th Orientation
- Automated System Calls Home @ 9am

Behavioral Systems (MBI)

Tier 3 - Intensive, Individual Interventions (6+ referrals)
- Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)
- Functional Behavior Assessment(FBA)
- Wraparound Services(AltaCare)
- Long-Term Check-In, Check-Out
- Milepost
- Schedule Change
- Mission Forward Placement
- Special Education Referral

Tier 2 - Targeted Group Interventions(2-5 referr
- Paired with an In-School Mentor
- Social Skills Group
- Schedule Change
- Assigned Study Tables
- Parent/Team Meeting
- Behavior Contracts
- Check-In, Check-Out (CICO)
- RTI Referral

Tier 1 - Universal Interventions(0-1 referrals)
- Freshman Jumpstart/6th Orientation
- Teaching/Modeling Universals
- Current Discipline Process
- Teaching of Behavior Expectations
  - Handbook Quiz
  - Bulldog Cards/PBIS
  - Active Supervision
  - Student/Parent/School Compact
- Early Warning System Identification
  - Top DAWG Assembly
  - MyVoice Student Survey
  - MBI Student Team

Program Tracking And Evaluation

Districts and schools are also encouraged to continuously assess how well their supports and interventions are working for students. It is most effective to do this at both the student and system levels. At the student level, teams can use a tracking tool to record interventions assigned to a specific student, how the student responded, and next steps.

Teams ideally have a system that integrates the EWS reports and keeps records electronically. Such a system allows teams to continuously update student records in real time to document the effectiveness of specific supports and to inform subsequent decisions. The figure below provides an example of a typical tracking worksheet.

EWS-EMBEDD INTO THE RTI PROCESS

RTI Tracking Sheet | St. Ignatius Middle/High School
Attach all relevant data (Smarter Balance, Map)

Student Name		Grade		Todays's Date

Intervention Recommendation ○ **Academic** ○ **Behavior** ○ **Both**

Days Absent	# of Referrals	Grades (GPA or Letter)	EWS%

Tier II-Intervention 1	Start Date	End Date	
Was Intervention Successful (Data)?			
Team Decision/Next Steps			
Why decision was made			

Tier II-Intervention 2	Start Date	End Date	
Was Intervention Successful (Data)?			
Team Decision/Next Steps			
Why decision was made			

Tier III	Start Date	End Date	
Was Intervention Successful (Data)?			
Team Decision/Next Steps			
Why decision was made			

At the system level, district and school leaders can use the tracking data and input from team leaders to inform periodic review of MTSS/EWS strategies and programs. Leaders may also consider partnering with an intermediary organization to conduct a formal evaluation of larger programs. Although potentially expensive, evaluations conducted by a third party can inform difficult decisions about whether to sustain programs that are popular but may not be cost-effective or meeting student needs.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

1. Does your district/school have a system in place to identify and support ninth-graders at risk of falling off track to graduation?

    a. If yes, in what ways does your system resemble an MTSS/EWS?

    b. If no, is an MTSS/EWS a feasible approach for your district/school?

★★☆ **SECTION 3**
Self-Assessment

OBJECTIVES

- Assess the strengths and challenges of the support provided to ninth-graders in your district.
- Identify changes needed to improve outcomes for ninth-graders.

FOCUS QUESTION

- What are areas of strength and barriers to improving supports for ninth-graders?

I. Activity: Warm-up discussion of your supports for ninth-graders

Directions: Answer the following questions individually, then discuss as a group for 10 minutes.

1. What kinds of supports does your district currently offer/want to offer students as they are transitioning into high school and during their freshman year? *(Check all that apply.)*

	CURRENTLY OFFER	WANT TO OFFER
High school orientation and course selection for eighth-graders in spring		
Summer bridge program for rising ninth-graders		
Extended ninth-grade orientation (1-3 freshmen-only days before school starts)		
High School and Beyond Plans for all ninth-graders (started in seventh or eighth grade)		
Data reports and teaming processes that identify rising and current ninth-graders at risk of dropping out and assign supports and interventions based on students' needs		
A multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) made up of:		
Comprehensive strategies for keeping students engaged and on track to graduation (e.g. staffing ninth grade with administrators and teachers skilled with early adolescents; engaging curriculum and instruction; culturally responsive environment; positive behavior and restorative discipline approaches; smaller units such as "houses" or interdisciplinary teams; providing advisory services; extracurricular activities)		

Targeted supports for students showing signs they are struggling academically and/or socially (e.g., tutoring, mentoring, flexible scheduling, group counseling, and activities)		
Intensive supports for students to address extreme barriers to learning, such as neglect, abuse, addiction, and homelessness (e.g., trauma-informed practices, 1:1 case management;)		
Other:		

2. Have you taken any steps in the past three years to strengthen your support for ninth-graders? If so, what is the status of your actions?

II. Activity: Assess specific Ninth Grade On Track strengths and challenges

Directions: This activity invites you and your team to assess your system for supporting ninth-grade success across four key components:

- Leadership, vision, goals, and continuous improvement
- Data use and early warning systems
- Multi-tiered systems of support
- Personalized learning environment and opportunities

STEP 1. For each of the four components, work individually to:

a. Answer the reflection questions.

b. Review the rubric for each component and give each element a score of 1 to 3, indicating whether this aspect of your Ninth Grade on Track programming is in a (1) developing, (2) implementing, or (3) mature/sustaining phase. Choose the rating that most accurately reflects your current program status.

c. Answer the summary questions about strengths in your system, barriers to improvement, and ways your district might address barriers and needs. For example, strengths or barriers might include the presence or lack of:
  - Shared vision and goals
  - Distributed leadership
  - Resources (e.g., funding, staff capacity)
  - Priority alignment (e.g., other school/district initiatives)
  - Reliability of data
  - Coordination with middle schools and upper grades
  - Sufficient staffing, including counselors and student support personnel
  - Administrator and teacher preparation
  - Student voice and choice
  - Stakeholder engagement

STEP 2. **As a group:**

a. Compare and discuss your answers and ratings.

b. Note areas in which your group feels your system is strong.

c. Note areas in which your group feels the district could improve.

d. Use these areas for improvement to develop ninth-grade success goals for your district. From these goals, you can develop action steps in the next section of this guide.

COMPONENT 1:
Leadership, vision, goals, and continuous improvement

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Does your district have a vision for ninth-grade success? Is your district actively building and/or strengthening the freshman experience? Does the vision include an understanding of the role ninth-grade success programming plays in broader high school goals, such as graduation and college and career readiness? Is that understanding shared by district and school staff members? How about students, families, and community members?

2. Does your district have specific, measurable goals for strengthening and/or expanding supports for ninth-graders in your district? Do those goals include equitable outcomes for all students? How were those goals developed? Who knows about them?

3. To what extent are your ninth-grade programs coordinated with each other and aligned with other district initiatives (e.g., dropout prevention, response to intervention, career and technical education, extracurricular activities)? How does this coordination and alignment look across middle and high schools?

4. Do you use data to track progress toward your Ninth Grade On Track goals and to refine your strategies? Does your data system enable you to routinely identify students who are sliding off track or are off track to graduation?

Note: For an in-depth self-assessment tool of distributed leadership roles and responsibilities in a ninth-grade success program, see this Freshman Success Inventory from the University of Chicago's Network for College Success.

Component 1 Rubric: Leadership, Vision, Goals, and Continuous Improvement

THEMES	DEVELOPING (1)	IMPLEMENTING (2)	MATURE/SUSTAINING (3)
Leadership SCORE ① ② ③	District and school administrators have collectively identified ninth-grade success as a strategic priority but have not yet established necessary systems and structures to implement ninth-grade success teams.	District and school administrators have established data reporting systems, intervention maps, and school-based ninth-grade success teams. They have created time for teams to meet regularly and have trained and empowered team leaders to facilitate productive team meetings. Most understand and visibly promote the importance of keeping ninth-graders on track to graduation.	Leadership for ninth-grade success is fully distributed across all system levels (district, school, team). All leaders understand and visibly promote the importance of keeping ninth-graders on track to graduation. District and school administrators continuously monitor and support ninth-grade teams. They routinely coach and consult with team leaders, remove barriers, and ensure teams are resourced, organized, and incentivized to act.
Vision SCORE ① ② ③	District and school administrators are developing a vision for ninth-grade success, but it may not yet be known to district and school staff members and has not been used to guide planning.	Vision is established and used to guide planning. It is visible to most district and school staff members and some stakeholders (e.g., via the district website).	Vision is fully established, vetted through a stakeholder input process, highly visible, and consistently used to guide planning. District and school staff members and stakeholders can articulate the purpose and goals of the ninth-grade success team, and statements are routinely reviewed and may be adjusted.
Goals SCORE ① ② ③	District and school administrators are developing goals to strengthen and improve ninth-grade outcomes, including data-informed equity goals, but goals are not specific or measurable and few district staff members are aware of the goals.	Specific and measurable goals to strengthen and improve ninth-grade outcomes, including equity goals, are set. Some district staff members are aware of the goals. Goals are infrequently reviewed or revised.	Specific and measurable goals to strengthen and improve ninth-grade outcomes are set, including equity goals. Most district staff members are aware of goals. Goals are reviewed annually and revised based on data and evidence.
Continuous Improvement SCORE ① ② ③	Data on ninth-grade outcomes are available, but district and school administrators have not developed a systematic plan to use data to monitor progress toward goals.	Leaders have set a plan to monitor progress toward goals, including equity goals. Plan has been implemented for at least one year.	Monitoring plan is set and continuously implemented. Data are routinely collected and analyzed each quarter or trimester to track implementation of ninth-grade supports, refine strategies, track progress toward goals, and inform development of new goals.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1. What's going well in this area? How can your district sustain progress?

2. What barriers might get in the way of improving leadership, vision, goals, and continuous improvement in your district? *List possible barriers below.*

3. How can you build on the strengths and the progress that's been made in this area? How can you remove barriers and address improvement needs?

COMPONENT 2:
Early warning systems

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Has your district developed early warning indicators (e.g., attendance, behavior, course performance) that identify students who are falling off the graduation path? If yes, are your indicators based on analyses of local data, or are they adopted from national research or from another district?

2. Has your district explored supplemental data that supports root-cause analysis, such as measures of social-emotional health and "checklist" data that support college and career readiness?

3. Does your district routinely provide school leaders with early warning reports? Do the reports display student-level data? Are there reports that display data aggregated to the school and district level? How easy is it to access the reports? How easy is it to interpret them? How frequently are the reports updated?

4. Who uses early warning data reports in your district and/or school(s)?

5. How do you train users of your early warning system? Is the training sufficient?

6. How do you monitor the effectiveness of your early warning system?

Component 2 Rubric: Early Warning Systems

THEMES	DEVELOPING (1)	IMPLEMENTING (2)	MATURE/SUSTAINING (3)
Indicators SCORE ① ② ③	District is developing a system of indicators that identify students who are falling off the graduation path. Administrators are either adopting national indicators or developing local indicators based on analysis of longitudinal district data. Indicators include attendance, behavior, and course performance, and few district and school staff members are aware they exist.	Attendance, behavior, and course performance indicators have been developed and communicated with staff. Administrators are viewing additional data elements to examine root causes, such as social-emotional health (e.g., Healthy Youth Survey, perception surveys and milestones). Additional data are used as a checklist for college and career readiness (e.g., college visits, career exploration activities).	A core set of academic, behavioral, and attendance indicators have been validated locally with an established routine for verifying thresholds each year. The district has disseminated information about the indicator system to all staff members, students, families, and community stakeholders and has solicited and responded to feedback. Team members feel comfortable using the indicators and supplemental data to support a range of student outcomes, such as social-emotional health and college and career readiness. District and building leaders review the indicator system on an annual basis and adjust as needed.
Reports SCORE ① ② ③	With input from experts, the district has designed a beta version of its early warning data reporting system and has solicited feedback from potential district and school-based users. The district has also planned for data to be updated in as close to real time as possible, compliance with student privacy laws (such as FERPA and HIPAA), frequent distribution of reports, and training and coaching for users.	Early warning reports are distributed as planned (e.g., biweekly to ninth-grade success teams, quarterly to school and district administrators). Users are trained to access and interpret the reports. Some teams and administrators are using the reports. The district has a plan to leverage the EWS reports with other data initiatives, so teams have one location to enter data and pull reports. The district has plans to add a student intervention monitoring system to the EWS. The district does not have the capacity to respond to extra training or customized requests.	All teams and administrators are routinely using the reports. The system provides one location for teams to enter data and pull reports for indicators and monitoring student interventions. The district provides coaching and has the capacity to respond to requests for additional training and customized reports. The district continuously monitors use, solicits input from users on access and design, and upgrades as needed.

THEMES	DEVELOPING (1)	IMPLEMENTING (2)	MATURE/SUSTAINING (3)
Resource map **SCORE** ① ② ③	A cross-level district/school team of selected administrators, counselors, and instructional and student support staff members have cataloged and mapped academic and behavioral interventions, as described (in Section 2, pp. 15-16) of this guide, and have identified inefficiencies and gaps in services. Few district or school staff members are aware of the resource map. The district has developed a plan and tools for monitoring student interventions.	The resource map has been vetted by district and school stakeholders. Potential users have been trained, and most ninth-grade success teams have integrated it into their practice. Teams use it to monitor student interventions and assess how well they are meeting student needs. A plan for realizing efficiencies and addressing service gaps has been developed but only partially implemented.	All ninth-grade success teams are using the resource map and monitoring student interventions. The system for monitoring interventions and supports has been integrated into the EWS. Plans for realizing efficiencies and addressing gaps have been fully implemented. District/school/team leaders regularly assess and take action to calibrate the balance of needs to resources. They communicate informally throughout the year and formally at least once per year.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1. What's going well in this area? How can your district sustain this progress?

2. What barriers might get in the way of implementing or improving an early warning system in your district? *List possible barriers below.*

3. How can you build on the strengths and the progress that's been made in this area? How can you remove barriers and address improvement needs?

COMPONENT 3:
Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Who plans, implements, and monitors supports and interventions for rising and struggling ninth-graders at the district level? At the school level? Are early warning data used to guide the process? Is the process managed by individuals or by teams similar to the ones described in section 2?

2. Has your district cataloged existing supports and interventions available for rising and struggling ninth-graders in your district? If so, are they organized into a **multi-tiered system of support resource map** that specifies prevention strategies for all students and targeted and intensive supports for struggling students?

3. Have you identified areas of need that you are not able to address with current programs? Is there a process in place to address those gaps?

4. How do you train individuals or teams in planning, implementing, and monitoring supports and interventions for rising and struggling ninth-graders? Is the training sufficient?

Component 3 Rubric: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

THEMES	DEVELOPING (1)	IMPLEMENTING (2)	MATURE/SUSTAINING (3)
Teaming SCORE ① ② ③	Principals, with district support, have formed a core ninth-grade success team in each high school that operates within a larger stakeholder team. Team members have been trained, roles and responsibilities have been assigned, and dedicated meeting time is in place. Teams are not meeting regularly and rarely use data, resource maps, or meeting protocols.	Core teams are meeting at least biweekly. They use data reports and resource maps to identify and support students. Team leaders have adapted protocols, meetings are productive, and coaching for team leaders is available. A stakeholder team meets quarterly, reviews aggregate data, troubleshoots core team issues, and addresses system issues.	Core teams prioritize ninth-grade success meetings and celebrate successes. Stakeholder teams support ongoing training, coaching, and monitoring; assess the effectiveness of interventions; and ensure data use and teaming processes are maintained. Ninth-graders' success is visible schoolwide. MTSS is continuously improved through ongoing feedback and annual systems review.
Comprehensive strategies (all students) SCORE ① ② ③	Common policies, practices, and programs for attendance, behavior, and academics are codified in staff and student handbooks specific for ninth grade. Dedicated administrators, counselors, and teachers have been recruited for ninth grade but not yet trained. Leaders have not directly communicated clear expectations or established a positive culture.	Ninth-grade policies, practices, and programs have been vetted by stakeholders and are understood by grade-level leaders, staff members, students, and families. Some ninth-grade leaders and staff members are trained to work effectively with adolescents from diverse backgrounds and meet to address issues and plan activities. Leaders promote a welcoming environment and a culture of collaboration, learning, and success.	Leaders use data to review and revise ninth-grade policies, practices, and programs annually with input from staff members, students, and stakeholders. All ninth-grade leaders and staff members are trained and equipped and collaborate weekly in regularly scheduled periods to address issues and plan activities. Leaders, staff members, and students enact routines and work together to create a positive culture, engaging learning opportunities, and equitable outcomes for all.
Targeted interventions (some students) SCORE ① ② ③	Academic and behavioral interventions, such as tutoring, counseling, mentoring, and extracurricular programs, are available for some students but not all who are falling off track. There are no mechanisms to ensure programs align with classroom instruction. Effectiveness is often unknown.	Targeted interventions and supports are available for most students who need them. Staff time is dedicated to aligning programs with instruction, reviewing placements, and monitoring effectiveness. Teachers may serve as advisors, and older students may serve as tutors or peer mentors.	Targeted interventions and supports are available for all students who need them. Standing meetings and other collaboration routines ensure alignment, coordination, ongoing assessment, and best fit for students. The entire ninth-grade staff and selected older students provide a web of support for struggling students.

THEMES	DEVELOPING (1)	IMPLEMENTING (2)	MATURE/SUSTAINING (3)
Intensive interventions (high-need students) SCORE ① ② ③	Intensive interventions, such as 1:1 case management, and "wraparound" social and health services are available for some students but not all who are off-track. No mechanisms are in place to monitor student placement and ensure programs are coordinated and aligned with common goals. Effectiveness is often unknown.	Intensive interventions are available for most students who need them. Staff time is dedicated to monitoring student placements and coordinating and aligning programs. Some programs are assessed for impact and cost-effectiveness.	Intensive interventions are available for all students who need them. Standing meetings and other collaboration routines ensure alignment, coordination, ongoing assessment, and best fit for students. District and school leaders gather feedback and outcome data throughout the year and review programs annually.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1. What's going well in this area? How can your district sustain this progress?

2. What barriers might get in the way of implementing/improving a multi-tiered system of support in your district? *List possible barriers below.*

3. How can you build on these strengths and the progress that's been made in this area? How can you remove barriers and address improvement needs?

COMPONENT 4:
Personalized learning environments and opportunities

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What is the learning environment and daily experience like for ninth-graders in your district? Are they welcomed into high school by administrators and teachers who understand how to build positive, trusting relationships with adolescents? Do they feel safe, known, and respected for their individual strengths and cultural identities? Are they valued as important contributing members of the school community?

2. Are ninth-graders actively engaged in developing High School and Beyond plans that guide their selection of courses, pathways, and other learning experiences? Are these plans known to administrators, counselors, teachers, and family members? Do students get excited about their plans?

3. Do ninth-graders experience engaging curriculum and instruction centered on real-world applications, project-based learning, and student-led or self-directed activities? Does the curriculum honor their developmental needs for independence, peer interaction, relevance, and identity exploration?

4. Do ninth-graders in your district have ample opportunities to explore college and career options (e.g., via career fairs, speakers, and/or field trips)?

Component 4 Rubric: Personalized learning environments and opportunities

THEMES	DEVELOPING (1)	IMPLEMENTING (2)	MATURE/SUSTAINING (3)
Relational trust SCORE ① ② ③	Leaders recognize the importance of creating a welcoming, safe, attuned, and responsive learning environment for ninth-graders, but community-building activities are episodic, ad hoc, optional, and not systemic. Traditional staff roles, bell schedules, and communications create barriers to building trusting relationships.	Some staff members understand the **theory of relational trust** and are trained in skills and dispositions necessary to establish trusting relationships with colleagues, students, and families. Opportunities for staff members and students to build community are prioritized and are systemic features of the ninth-grade experience. Staff-student communication involves deeper listening and productive conversations, but communication with families remains predominantly unidirectional information sharing.	All staff members are disposed and equipped to establish trusting relationships with colleagues, students, and families. Ninth-graders routinely report feeling seen, known, and cared for by at least one adult in the school. Staff members, students, and families engage in deep, productive conversations about student learning and growth. Using data, leaders can demonstrate the connections between relational trust and ninth-graders' engagement and achievement.
High School and Beyond planning SCORE ① ② ③	Ninth-grade counselors receive HSB plans that students started in seventh or eighth grade, and they know about **HSB requirements and resources** and multiple pathways to graduation. Some students complete required HSB elements with support from counselors, but no system is in place to support all students.	All ninth-grade staff members are trained in **Career Guidance Washington**. Regular time is scheduled for ninth-graders to participate in self- and career-exploration activities (e.g., advisory or ninth-grade seminar period). Most students complete the required HSB elements.	All ninth-graders complete required HSB elements. They are aware of what they need to graduate and have concrete ideas for their future. Students take on more proactive roles in creating their personalized pathway (e.g., through student-led conferences, projects, job shadowing, college visits).
Academic engagement SCORE ① ② ③	Ninth-grade teachers are aware of and encouraged to use active, applied, and cooperative learning strategies and culturally responsive instruction to engage students. Some ninth-grade teachers of core academic subjects use these strategies predominantly in their classrooms.	Most ninth-grade teachers are trained in and center their instruction around active, applied, cooperative, and culturally responsive instruction. Some students have opportunities to earn credit for independent study or community- or work-based learning. Ninth-grade leaders invite student input into curriculum and instruction development on an ad hoc basis.	All ninth-grade teachers are trained in and center their instruction around active, applied, cooperative, and culturally responsive instruction. All students have opportunities to earn credit for independent study or community-based learning through individual or group activities. Ninth-grade teachers routinely ensure student voice in course development and accredited learning options via a student council or committee representatives.

THEMES	DEVELOPING (1)	IMPLEMENTING (2)	MATURE/SUSTAINING (3)
Social-emotional learning (SEL) engagement **SCORE** ① ② ③	Some ninth-grade staff members are aware of **Washington's SEL standards and benchmarks** and how adolescence, trauma, toxic stress, social exclusion, and cultural bias can interfere with learning. Some staff members implement strategies to address these barriers and teach SEL skills, but systems are not in place to support all students or to disrupt conditions and practices that foster disengagement and alienation.	All ninth-grade staff members have completed OSPI's SEL online education modules. Most students and staff members are supported by evidence-based programs to promote SEL, such as mentoring, positive behavior and restorative justice practices, implicit bias training, and community meetings. Ninth-grade leaders make SEL a positive, visible aspect of the ninth-grade experience.	All ninth-grade students and staff members participate in SEL programs. SEL and health are embedded in all aspects of ninth-graders' school experience. Ninth-grade leaders routinely invite input from students and staff members on SEL programs and support student-led efforts to grow a culture of empathy and equity alongside academic excellence.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1. What's going well in this area? How can your district sustain this progress?

2. What barriers might get in the way of improving personalized learning for ninth-graders in your district? *List possible barriers below.*

3. How can you build on these strengths and the progress that's been made in this area? How can you remove barriers and address improvement needs?

Action Steps

OBJECTIVES

- **Identify areas that are working well and need to be maintained.**
- **Revisit current goals and/or set new goals for improving Ninth Grade on Track outcomes.**
- **Identify strategies you will pursue to achieve your goals.**
- **Map action steps for your improvement efforts.**
- **Set an implementation timeline and monitoring agreements.**

FOCUS QUESTION

- **What will we do over the next one to three years to improve ninth-graders' experience and outcomes?**

DIRECTIONS

- **Identify areas in which we are doing well, what we want to keep, and which strategies are helping us sustain our progress.**
- **Pick one or two areas you most want to improve and use the template provided in this section (or your own district-based strategic planning tool) to record current and/or new goals for improvement in these areas.**
- **For each goal, discuss and record strategies* and action steps you will take to achieve it. Identify a strategy leader and describe how you will monitor the effectiveness of the strategy over time.**
- **For each action step, record a most responsible person (MRP), timeline, and how you will monitor implementation.**

  *Note: Rubric components and sub-components in this guide can also serve as strategies.

NINTH GRADE ON TRACK ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

SMART Goal: [District name] will increase Ninth Grade on Track rates
among [student group, e.g., Latino male students]
by X percentage points (from X percent to X percent) by [date].

Strategy 1: [e.g., staff/resource development, instruction, curriculum, counseling/tutoring/mentoring, outreach, partnership development/coordination, data use]

Rationale: [e.g., Latino male students are disproportionately off track to graduation in our district by the end of ninth grade. Research finds that students taught and/or mentored by adults who share their cultural background and experiences are more likely to stay engaged in school. Our district does not effectively recruit and retain Latino educators or mentors; therefore, we will develop and implement a human resource initiative to increase Latino male students' access to Latino educators and mentors in ninth grade.]

Strategy lead: [Name, role]

Monitoring effectiveness: What ongoing formative evidence will be gathered to show this strategy is making a difference in student outcomes? When will we collect and reflect on this evidence?

Activities to Implement This Strategy? *What activities will occur? What steps will staff members take?*	Professional Development *How will staff members acquire the necessary skills and attitudes to implement the activity?*	Timeline *When will this action begin and end?*	Resources Available *What are the existing and new resources that will be used to accomplish this activity?*	Who's Most Responsible? Who's Involved? *Who will provide the leadership? Who will do the work?*	Accountability *Who will check for completion? Who will provide needed support to ensure action plan steps are finished?*

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Achievement gap
The disparity in academic performance among identified groups or the difference between how a group performs compared with what is expected of that group.

Action plan
A step-by-step outline of the actions that need to be taken to implement an initiative and achieve a desired outcome. For each major action, plans typically identify the resources needed, measures of effective implementation, who is responsible for the action, and a timeline for implementation.

Aggregation
Data that are presented in summary (as opposed to individual student-level data or data broken down by subgroup).

Capacity building
Providing opportunities, such as staff development, data analysis, and time for collaboration, that enhance the ability of staff members to increase access to Ninth Grade on Track supports and programs.

Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS)
CEDARS is the Washington state warehouse for longitudinal education data. Districts report data on courses, students, and teachers. Course data include standardized state course codes. Student data include demographics, enrollment information, schedules, grades, and program participation. Teacher data include demographics, certifications, and schedules.

Collaboration
To work jointly with others, especially on an intellectual endeavor.

Correlation
A mutual relation between two or more things. Correlation does not imply causation.

Cycle of inquiry and action
The cycle of inquiry is a process in which educators analyze data—such as demographic, perceptual, school process, and student achievement data—to understand how these elements are interrelated and what they suggest about students' learning needs. As a multistep process, the cycle of inquiry often involves analyzing data to better understand student needs, developing hypotheses about instructional practice, formulating and implementing action plans to improve student learning and achievement, and then once again analyzing data to evaluate student progress and inform next steps.

Data-based decisionmaking
Systematically collecting and analyzing various types of data to guide a range of decisions and improve the success of students and schools. Also referred to as data-driven decisionmaking, data-informed decisionmaking, and evidence-based decisionmaking.

Data champion
An individual who is passionate about using data and who can lead the quest for a culture of inquiry and systemic data use.

Data coach
An individual charged with helping schools or districts use data effectively to make decisions. Often, data coaches organize school-based data teams, lead practitioners in a collaborative inquiry process, help interpret data, or educate staff members on using data to improve instructional practices and student achievement.

Data culture	Data culture describes a school and/or district environment that includes attitudes, values, goals, norms of behavior, and practices, accompanied by an explicit vision for data use by leadership and that characterize a group's appreciation for the importance and power that data can bring to the decision-making process. It also includes the recognition that data collection is a necessary part of an educator's responsibilities and that the use of data to influence and inform practice is an essential tool that will be used frequently.
Data inventory	A catalog of the data available in a school, who controls the data, the location of the data, accessibility, and how the data are being used.
Data literacy	The ability to ask and answer questions about collecting, analyzing, and making sense of data.
Data manager	Generally, a staff member in the Information Technology department who coordinates the systems for the collection, storage, and dissemination of data at the district and/or school level.
Data point	A data point is one score on a graph or chart, which represents a single point in time.
Data quality	The attributes of a dataset that make data useful, such as validity, reliability, completeness, accuracy, timeliness, and relevance to the question being investigated.
Datasets	Sets of data made up from separate elements, which can be manipulated and analyzed in an effort to answer a question.
Data teams	*School data team*: A representative group of individuals that builds the capacity of building-level staff members to effectively use data by providing structures, training, and support. A primary mission of a school data team is to create a culture of inquiry and data use at the building level.
	District data team: A representative group of individuals that builds the capacity of district-level staff members to effectively use data by providing structures, training, and support. A primary mission of a district data team is to create a district-wide culture of inquiry and data use and to support school-level data teams
Data use improvement plan	An action plan designed to eliminate one or more barriers that limit effective data use in the school.
Disaggregation	Summary data split into different subgroups (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, economic status).
Disproportionality	Disproportionality occurs when a given subgroup is represented in a larger or smaller proportion in a particular program or educational environment than would be predicted based on the representation of that subgroup in a total population
Enablers and barriers	Terms used in the data use theory of action to describe policies, structures, capacities, or processes that either support (enablers) or hinder (barriers) effective data use in the schools.

Evaluation	Evaluation is the comparison of actual impacts against strategic plans. It looks at original objectives, what was accomplished, and how it was accomplished.
Evidence	An outward sign or indication; something that provides proof.
Evidence-based practices	Evidence-based practices are educational practices and instructional strategies that are supported by scientific research studies.
Factual observations	A statement about what the data say without any interpretation. Factual observations are the first step in the data analysis process, and they provide the basis for making sound inferences.
Fidelity of implementation	Fidelity refers to the accurate and consistent provision or delivery of a Ninth Grade on Track program in the manner in which it was designed or prescribed.
Formative evidence	Student-, building-, and district-level data focused on Ninth Grade on Track program access, participation and outcomes. Analysis of the data occurs routinely and systemically with the express goal of improving student achievement.
High-level data	Typically aggregate data that can be used to initiate the inquiry process. The review of high-level data will result in the creation of focusing questions that will help identify more granular data that can be used to extend the inquiry.
Impact	A high-level result of the initiative that is not always directly measurable, such as increased motivation to do well in school.
Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS)	A **prevention-focused, problem-solving service delivery framework** that systematically connects all of the academic and nonacademic interventions, supports and services available both in the school and the community to support instruction and eliminate barriers to learning and teaching.

An MTSS contains the following the components:

- Shared Leadership
- Data-Based Problem-Solving and Decision Making
- Layered Continuum of Supports
- Evidence-based Instruction, Intervention and Assessments
- Universal Screening and Progress Monitoring
- Family, School, and Community Partnering

Ninth Grade on Track	A measure of whether ninth-graders are on track to graduation. For OSPI, the rate of credits students earned relative to credits they attempted in ninth grade. See **Ninth-Graders on Track Frequently Asked Questions**.
Objective	The stated measurable result of a strategy or the action steps taken to implement that strategy, such as adjusting the master schedule to increase access to a Ninth Grade on Track support (e.g., tutoring, mentoring, counseling, extracurricular activities).

Outcome   A longer-range measurable change in behavior, such as continually improving high school graduation rates or college enrollment.

Population   Every student who is eligible to become a member of a specific sample of students. For example, the population of ninth-graders is all ninth-graders who may be enrolled in the district.

Problem statement   A clear, succinct, evidence-based statement of the problem that has been revealed by analyzing the relevant data.

Question types   *Guiding question:* A question that guides deeper inquiry into the initial issue and suggests additional data that may need to be collected and analyzed.

Focusing question: A high-level question related to an issue of interest that serves to initiate an inquiry and suggests the preliminary data that need to be collected and analyzed.

Reflection question: A follow-up question that encourages further exploration of an issue and leads to next steps.

Sample   A group of students included in a dataset. For example, the group of ninth-graders in a district for any one school year is a sample of the entire population of ninth-graders who may be enrolled in the district. The extent to which that group of ninth-graders is representative of the entire population is the extent to which generalizations can be made to ninth-graders in the future.

Stakeholder   Any individual who is involved with or is affected by a course of action or who has a vested interest in the enterprise, its policies, practices, and outcomes.

Strategy   A plan of action designed to achieve a particular goal.

Standards   In the context of Ninth Grade on Track programming, standards can refer to:

- What educators and the student support staff should know and be able to do to work effectively with ninth-graders
- What students should know and be able to do to be successful in ninth grade
- Measurable criteria ninth-grade transition supports and programs must adhere to in order to maintain quality and rigor

Target   A relatively short-range measurable change, such as an annual increase as part of a multi-year goal.

Timeline   The date at which an action step will be completed; for an ongoing action, when it is "up and running."

Trend line   A trend line is a line on a graph that represents a line of best fit through a set of data points.

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