

**SCHOOL SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT**  
**Implementing Multi-Tiered Systems of Support in Edmonds**

**Partner** Edmonds School District

**Team** Vicki Nishioka, Rachel Maller, Zoe Velie



Edmonds School District is one of the most racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse districts in Washington state. In 2021–21, over half of students enrolled in the district identified as a person of color, over 16 percent were emerging multilingual students who received English language learner services, and 38 percent qualified for free or reduced-price lunch.

In 2019–20, the district developed a strategic plan featuring a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) as a key strategy for improving academic, behavioral, and social and emotional learning. However, staff member buy-in, knowledge, and implementation of MTSS varied widely across the district. Edmonds also faced challenges related to changes in leadership and limited or outdated district-level systems for data-based decision making and effective instruction. On top of it all, like districts across the country, Edmonds faced significant challenges and disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Improving equity, engagement, and outcomes**

Edmonds leadership reached out to Education Northwest to partner on a plan to improve equity, engagement, and student outcomes. The goals of the partnership included creating:

A school improvement process aligned with the district’s strategic plan, focused on equity, and implementing MTSS with fidelity throughout the district

Tools and processes for use in implementing the district’s Equity, Engagement, and Excellence MTSS (E3 MTSS) framework

Data-based tools for the school board, district, and building teams that foster alignment of the strategic plan, school improvement plan, and building team implementation plans

Overall, the goal of this partnership was to build Edmonds leaders’ knowledge, skills, and confidence in using data-driven continuous improvement processes and to establish the structural conditions—policy, procedures, training materials—that will allow them to sustain these processes.

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## Collaborating to implement MTSS

The first step of any partnership is to understand the local context. We conducted a needs assessment of Edmonds School District's data capacity, MTSS implementation, and progress toward the performance indicators of its strategic plan. We co-facilitated monthly meetings with three teams of district staff members—assistant superintendents who supervise buildings, a district-level cross departmental team focused on implementing MTSS, and 11 building principals who volunteered to co-develop and pilot MTSS tools. We also met weekly with assistant superintendent Dr. Helen Joung, who oversees MTSS development and implementation for Edmonds. Then, with the insight gained through this collaboration, we helped the district develop professional development, MTSS Self-Assessment Checklist, and data driven decision-making tools for districtwide implementation.

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## Piloting change across the district

This partnership allowed the district to enhance consistency in leadership structures and use of district-approved instruction and resources. Edmonds revised and implemented procedures for MTSS, school improvement planning, and progress monitoring. Eleven elementary, middle, and high school leaders piloted these changes in the 2023–24 school year.

As with many new initiatives, helping staff members adopt the right mindset was central to the work. Together, we achieved this through consistent messaging, eliciting feedback from all levels to inform planning and implementation, and providing ongoing training on embedding MTSS into school improvement planning. Our collaboration helped Edmonds implement organizational changes, focused leadership on data-based decision making and use of evidence-based practices to improve equity, inclusion, and better outcomes for each student.

**“Education Northwest’s Vicki Nishioka helped me grow as an instructional leader by partnering with me through various initiatives. The support was all about growing the capacity of individuals and the system to continue the work in a robust way rather than offering cookie-cutter answers to our problems of practice. I deeply appreciated this approach to build our capacity over the last several years of partnership.”**

**– Helen Joung, Assistant Superintendent, Edmonds School District**