



The Evolution of School Counseling and MTSS Alignment: A Summary Goodman-Scott, Betters-Bubon, Donohue, Olsen (2026)

Our Beginning

Our collaborative, School Counselors for MTSS, emerged from our shared history in the field of school counseling. Each of us began our MTSS work as school counselors who were integral to our school's MTSS (or back then, PBIS) implementation. We each saw firsthand the effectiveness of this three-tiered system of prevention and intervention framework within our schools. We also saw the benefits of implementing MTSS as school counselors. We gained new insight and expanded our capacity as we implemented school counseling programs. We grew as leaders, collaborators, advocates while working toward building more equitable systems in nurturing, safe and inclusive schools.

Between 2014 and 2016, we became school counselor educators and scholars and realized that there was a lack of information specific to MTSS for school counselors. As new faculty, we met each other by happenstance: through conferences and mutual acquaintances in 2014. We noted there were few trainings, articles, webinars, or conference sessions that focused on the school counselor's role in MTSS implementation. As counselor educators, our role is to train the next generation of school counselors, mental health counselors, and doctoral students. Seeing the lack of SC/MTSS content in the field, we also aimed to expand these efforts, so we could better prepare future school counselors and train school counselors already in schools to become effective MTSS team members and leaders.

SC/MTSS Alignment Over Time

As we reflect on our work as School Counselors for MTSS, we highlight the significant growth in SC/MTSS and our profession over the last few years.

Milestones in SC/MTSS Alignment

- 2008: First American School Counselor Association (ASCA) position statement; updated 2014; 2018; 2021
- 2016: Special issue on SC/MTSS in the national journal *The Professional Counselor*
- 2019: First book on SC/MTSS for K-12 school counselors: *The School Counselor's Guide to MTSS* (edited by Emily Goodman-Scott, Jennifer Betters-Bubon, and Peg Donohue)
- 2020: First version of *Making MTSS Work* (Goodman-Scott, Betters-Bubon, Olsen, & Donohue), published by ASCA
- 2021: ASCA magazine on SC/MTSS (Sept/Oct edition)

- 2024: Special issue on Tier 2 in ASCA’s *Professional School Counseling*
- 2025: MTSS prominently featured in the ASCA National Model (5th ed)
- 2025: Validated and published SC/MTSS assessment: rigorous data analysis provided empirical support for the conceptual model of SC/MTSS alignment (Goodman-Scott, Kalkbrenner, Olsen & Betters-Bubon)

ASCA Position Statement: The School Counselor and Multitiered System of Supports

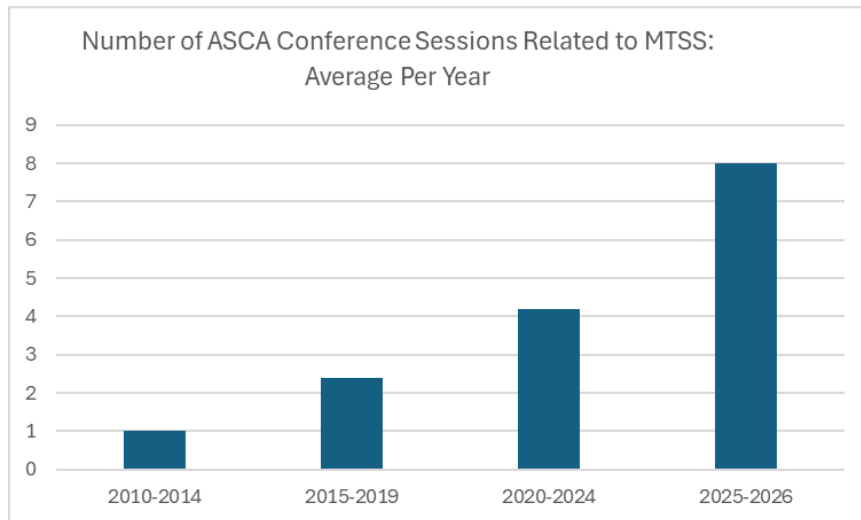
In 2008, ASCA first published a position statement related to MTSS, which is in its fourth version. Please see the specifics below.

- **Adopted 2008** (named Response to Intervention): “Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tiered approach to help struggling learners... Through the review of data, professional school counselors identify struggling students and collaborate with other educators to provide appropriate interventions through the RTI process.” This focus was largely on achievement and RTI as a process to support students, especially academically.
- **Revised 2014**: “Professional school counselors are stakeholders in the development and implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), including but not limited to Response to Intervention (RTI) and Culturally Responsive Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (CR PBIS). Professional school counselors align their work with MTSS through the implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program designed to improve student achievement and behavior.” Here, the position statement broadened to name MTSS specifically, focusing on academics, behaviors, and culturally responsive practices. As in the 2008 version, MTSS was seen as a process to support struggling students: “MTSS ensures an informed, intentional approach to help students with various learning challenges.”
- **Revised 2018**: “MTSS is a culturally responsive, evidence-based framework implemented in K–12 schools using data-based problem solving to integrate academic and behavioral instruction and intervention at tiered intensities to improve the learning and social/emotional functioning of all students.” This update had a greater focus on every student, collaboration and consultation with stakeholders, and integrating school counseling with MTSS.
- **Revised 2021**: “School counselors are stakeholders in the development and implementation of multitiered system of supports (MTSS)... School counselors align their work with MTSS through the implementation of a school counseling program.” This most recent version expanded on the description of school counselors’ roles in MTSS as well as many more citations and resources, reflecting the larger literature base on this topic.

ASCA Conference Sessions

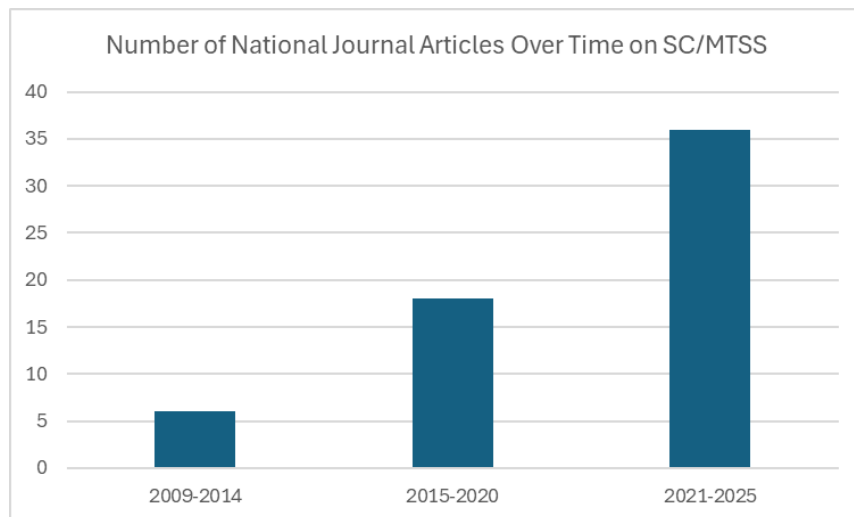
The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) conference is the flagship conference in the school counseling field. To better understand the evolution of MTSS/School Counseling alignment, we examined conference sessions that included MTSS in the title since the first

identified session in 2010. In the following chart, we see that the frequency of sessions at the ASCA conference on the topic of MTSS, tiered supports, etc. has increased substantially.



Journal Articles: Frequency

Next, we examined articles published in national journals, with a focus on school counseling and MTSS. We see that these numbers have increased greatly since 2009.



Journal Articles: Content and Topics

In the last 10-15 years, a host of scholars have published articles on SC/MTSS efforts. To describe these trends:

- Early articles described how to align the ASCA National Model with MTSS, including RTI (Ockerman et al., 2012), PBIS (Goodman-Scott et al., 2015), and MTSS (Ziomiek-Daigle et al., 2016).
- Over time, scholarship expanded to detail case studies, or examples of what this SC/MTSS alignment looks like in exemplar schools, describing case studies or models. These publications often addressed SC/MTSS alignment as a strategy for school counselor effectiveness, efficiency, and equity; culturally sustaining practices; collaboration; and the use of data.
- The next wave of SC/MTSS scholarship provided: (a) an increase in surveys with larger samples (i.e., looking at school counselor preparation and training) as well as (b) qualitative research, or in-depth descriptions with small samples (i.e., schools with RAMP and MTSS). These studies continued to expand the field’s knowledge on this construct or practices of SC/MTSS alignment.
- More recently, scholarship on SC/MTSS has become more specific and nuanced, covering topics such as mental health screening and leadership, as well as an entire journal special issue dedicated to Tier 2 supports (2024). In addition, there have been a significant number of published journal articles in which scholars describe MTSS as a multi-tiered lens for school counselors to utilize when addressing a range of topics. For instance, scholars have applied the MTSS framework to guide school counselors’ efforts in: antiracism, college and career readiness for Black males, neurodiversity-affirming practices, mindfulness, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, trauma-informed practices, suicide prevention and intervention, supporting immigrant students, and more.

Status of MTSS in State-level School Counseling Models

Finally, we examined state-level school counseling models to understand the extent of SC/MTSS alignment in each state across the U.S.

We asked the question: **Does this state have a school counseling model that is clearly identified as being aligned with MTSS?** Based on an evaluation of programs in 2026, we found:

- 13 states: Yes
- 06 states: Moderate

Thus, nearly 40% of states have some degree of SC/MTSS alignment on their state website. And our hunch is—this number is likely even higher. The reality is, states communicate their comprehensive school counseling program in a variety of ways: some are led by the state Department of Education; others are led by the state School Counseling Association. As such, we know that at least nearly 40% or more of states have state-wide models aligning aspects of MTSS and comprehensive school counseling programs.

School Counselors for MTSS

Since 2014, our research collaborative, SC4MTSS, has published over 30 articles together as well as numerous conference sessions, keynote presentations, and trainings for school districts and professional associations. Recent highlights have included:

- Developing, validating, and publishing the *School Counselor/MTSS Alignment Scale* (published in the *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*). While we have discussed school counseling/MTSS alignment for years, this study provides evidence supporting this theory and reinforces over a decade of our previous research
- Completing edits on our second book with ASCA, *Making MTSS Work*, with an anticipated publication date of July 2026. In this book, we highlight best practices and concrete strategies for SC/MTSS alignment.
- Working on our third edition of an edited book, *The School Counselors' Guide to MTSS*, with Routledge. Along with a range of experts in school counseling and MTSS, we provide an in-depth background related to SC/MTSS alignment.
- One of our co-founders, Dr. Jennifer Better-Bubon, gave the 2026 keynote address at the Evidence-based School Counseling Conference titled *Systems that Support*, discussing MTSS as a culturally sustaining, trauma-informed, healing-centered approach to prevention and intervention in schools, highlighting the crucial role of student voice and involvement from families and community members.

This pivotal time of creation is also a time for reflection, as we consider the evolution of our SC/MTSS work, as well as the evolution within the field of school counseling.

Making an Impact

Since 2014, we have provided professional development on SC/MTSS alignment to school counselors, educators, and administrators throughout the country and internationally. In some instances, we've had the gift of partnering with districts for several years, witnessing positive systemic change over time. We are pleased that our work has been shaped by the exceptional work of so many school counselors, K-12, from coast to coast and abroad.

Unique to our collaborative, our work is grounded in our research. As a team, we have more than 30 articles published in peer-reviewed, national journals on the topic of SC/MTSS. We also present our research and our collaboration with practitioners at national conferences; we are regular presenters at the American School Counselor Association, the Evidence-Based School Counseling Conference, the American Counseling Association, the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, and more. We look forward to our two upcoming publications, *Making MTSS Work* (anticipated July 2026) and *The School Counselor's Guide to MTSS* (Anticipated summer 2027).

Now, we have collaborated for well over a decade: publishing and contributing to research on MTSS, including co-founding the research and training collaborative, *School Counselors for MTSS*. We have a shared interest in helping schools and school counselors be efficient, effective, and equitable. And we believe that SC/MTSS alignment helps us do just that. We are committed

to helping move the field of education and, specifically, school counseling forward: leaning into systemic change, culturally sustaining and evidence-based practices, and partnering with school counselors, teachers, administrators, families, community members, and, most importantly, partnering with and centering students.

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