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Early Multi-tiered System of Supports (Early MTSS) Universal Expectations and Supports for Vermont's Early Care and Education Environments

Purpose

This document outlines the minimum universal evidence-based best practices that support competency building for each adult working within Vermont's UPK programs as well as each and every child and their family. Universal Supports for each and every child occur through nurturing and responsive relationships and equitable and inclusive high-quality environments. Early MTSS is a continuous improvement framework that builds on foundational supports as they are implemented in the learning environment.

Early MTSS Universal Tier

At the Universal Tier, adults are expected to embed equitable and inclusive evidence-based practices needed to ensure the promotion of the social and emotional development of each and every child and their family, to meet the needs of each and every child in their learning environment and identify children who need support or skill building beyond the universal level.

The Universal Tier actively supports each and every child's engagement, embeds instruction within all routines, planned, and play activities, responds to children's conversations; promoting the communicative attempts of children with language delays and disabilities, between children, and provides descriptive encouragement to promote skill learning and development.

Nurturing and Responsive Relationships Daily Expectations

Creating a Caring Classroom Community

- Teach children how to care for one another by helping each other, inviting another child to play together, celebrating accomplishments, and giving compliments.
- Create a classroom that is a place children and families want to be (e.g., reflect children's home and cultures, feel comfortable, welcoming, and safe).
- Give children opportunities to be leaders in the classroom and helpers to their peers.
- Display children's art and products in the classroom with contributions from every child.



- Represent families in the classroom with family photos, projects, and other materials created by families.
- Give children and families opportunities to participate in making decisions about the classroom community.
- Use knowledge about individual children and families when planning activities.
- Show appreciation and gratitude to children and families.

Relationships with Children

- Greet children on arrival.
- Call children by names throughout the day.
- Communicate with children at eye level.
- Use a calm, positive, and supportive tone of voice.
- Show respect and warmth to all children.
- Speak to children who are dual language learners with key words from their home language.
- Attend to children in positive ways at times when children are not engaging in challenging behavior.
- Use a variety of strategies for building relationships with all families (e.g., send celebration notes home, make home visits, invite families to visit the classroom, visual displays of children’s families in the classroom, phone calls to families).
- Create a classroom that is a place that children and families want to be (i.e., reflect children’s home and cultures, feel comfortable, welcoming, and safe).

Supportive Conversations

- Reflect and expand on children’s verbal and nonverbal communication.
- Respond to children’s communication by asking questions and making comments.
- Join children’s play and support and expand their interactions with their peers.
- Communicate using alternative strategies with children who are non-verbal, have a language delay, or speak English as a second language.

Positive Attention

- Comment frequently on children’s appropriate behavior (at minimum 5:1 with 5 positive remarks for every one re-direction).
- Use positive descriptive feedback for children’s skills, behaviors, and activities.
- Convey enthusiasm while giving positive descriptive feedback and encouragement.

- Use forms of acknowledgment that are individualized to children, including use of nonverbal cues of appreciation (e.g., smile, thumbs up, pat on the back).

Relationships Among Children

- Create opportunities for positive interactions between children in daily routines (e.g., arrival, meals, departure).
- Extend play by offering ideas and making connections between children.

Relationships with Families

- Use strategies that are culturally, linguistically, and identity affirming with all families.
- Use a variety of strategies for building relationships with all families.
- Offer a variety of opportunities to contribute to the classroom community, including opportunities for families who cannot come into the classroom.
- Match communication to the individual needs and preferences of families, ensuring that each family is reached in a meaningful way in their home language.
- Engage in bi-directional (multiple back and forth) communication with families to share information and give families a way to share information with the classroom teachers.
- Include ways to share celebrations of their child's accomplishments.
- Partner with families to identify strategies to use at home when they have concerns about their child's social-emotional development or behavior.
- Provide families with support as needed so that they are confident and comfortable in supporting their children's social-emotional development.
- Share information with families about community resources related to social-emotional development and challenging behavior.

High Quality, Supportive Environments

Predictable Daily Schedule

Create and post a visual schedule (at the child's eye level):

- Include photographs or clip art for each activity.
- Represents all daily activities.
- Is posted where children can view and manipulate.
- Is designed to accommodate when changes occur.
- Is designed to indicate the passage of time.
- Is visible the entire day.

Develop and Implement a Classroom Schedule That

- Minimizes the number of transitions across the day.
- Includes a balance of teacher-directed and child-directed activities that includes play.
- Includes both large and small group activities throughout each day.
- Refer to and review the classroom schedule with children throughout the day (e.g., when it is time to change activities, during transitions).
- Make a visual modification to the schedule when changes occur and review with children.

Implementing Predictable Classroom Routines

- Design and implement predictable routines within daily activities.
- Follow routines consistently on a day-to-day basis.
- Embed instruction into activities and routines across the day.
- Structure teacher-directed activities so there is a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Plan for and embed the use of materials, visuals, and teaching strategies that promote active participation of all children across all routines.

Promoting Children’s Engagement

- Plan for and select activities and materials that support engagement across the day.
- Modify activities or materials when children lose interest.
- Provide children with multiple opportunities to make choices across the day (e.g., during large group, small group, play, etc.).
- Assist children to select centers and become engaged.
- Comment positively and descriptively on children’s engagement.
- Redirect unengaged children and support them to become actively engaged.

Modifying the Curriculum to Meet Individual Needs

- Individualize instruction based on children’s interests, needs, and abilities.
- Adapt instruction to meet children’s individual needs.
- Adapt materials to meet children’s individual needs.

Transitions

- Provide a whole class warning or cue prior to transitions.

- Use transition strategies (e.g., games, songs, or other actions) to ensure that all children are actively engaged during the transition, including children who are waiting for the next activity.
- Teach the specific steps and expectations for transitions.
- Acknowledge and give specific positive descriptive feedback to children who transition appropriately.
- Provide individual support to children who have difficulty transitioning.
- Provide children with multiple opportunities to make choices across the day (e.g., during large group, small group, play).
- Support children to select centers and become engaged.
- Comment positively and descriptively on children’s engagement.
- Redirect unengaged children and support them to become actively engaged.

Providing Clear and Effective Directions

- Use directions that are simple, short, and specific.
- State directions in a calm, quiet, and neutral tone in close proximity to children.
- Phrase directions as statements; tell children what to do rather than what not to do.
- Check in with children to make sure they understand the directions.
- Acknowledge and give specific positive descriptive feedback to children who follow directions.
- Individualize directions with modeling, visuals, or gestures for children who need more support.

Teaching Behavior Expectations Across Classroom Routines

- Identify 2-5 expectations (e.g., “we are safe”, “we are kind”) that apply to adults and children and post in the classroom. Include a visual or symbol on the poster.
- Identify a small number of rules (five or fewer) for the classroom, an activity, or setting (e.g., center time or outdoor play). Rules should be positively stated and operationalize or define the expectations. Provide a visual for each rule.
- Refer to expectations multiple times throughout the day and link statements about appropriate behavior to the expectations.
- Facilitate conversations with children about the behavior expectations and rules and why they are important for them and the class.
- Provide instruction on posted expectations and rules during large group or small group activities (including how rules are connected to expectations).

- Review posted expectations or rules regularly before or at the beginning of an activity.
- Give positive descriptive feedback to all children when they demonstrate the expectations or follow the rules.
- Individualize instruction on posted rules and expectations for children who need more support.

The Data-Based Decision-Making Process

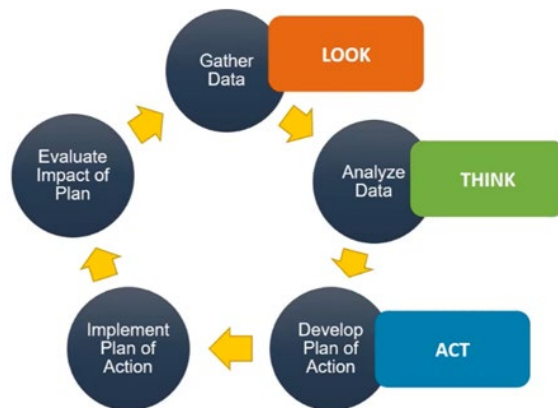
Look, Think, Act

Data can be any high quality, trustworthy information that describes both how students are progressing, and what teachers or programs are doing to contribute to that progress. While “data” often refers to assessment information gathered on children (TS Gold, direct assessments or teacher-developed checklists of developmental skills), it should also refer to information gathered to describe the classroom, including classroom practices used across all routines and activities.

Understanding “data-based decision making” means, first, understanding what data we should gather and analyze. For example, using data-based decision making in order to determine whether a child is demonstrating age-appropriate skills as defined in the [Vermont Early Learning Standards \(VELS\)](#), or using data to determine whether an educator is implementing evidence based practices to fidelity in the classroom.

When data are examined within a data decision-making process adults must “ask questions” about what the data might mean and consider factors that can influence the data.

Data Decision-Making Cycle



Reference: [National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations](#)

The Steps within Data-Based Decision Making Cycle

1. **Collect Data:** This can be program wide, classroom practices or individual child data. Select the assessment tools and procedures and standards for evaluating the discrepancy with strengths and gaps in skill.
2. **Problem-Identification: Look** at the data: Is there a discrepancy between current performance and expected or desired levels (in program, classroom or child-level data)?
 - Identify patterns.
 - Make comparisons.
 - Identify commonalities.
 - Identify discrepancies.
 - Look for unexpected results.
 - Identify questions that result from the data review.
 - Identify the need to access additional data.
3. **Problem Analysis: Think** about the data and generate questions about the data: Why does the discrepancy exist? What factors can be contributing to the problem? Are there concerns about the quality of data and how data were collection, are there external factors affecting the data?
4. **Intervention Implementation: Act** on the data: What can be done to reduce the gap between current and expected performance? What resources, professional development or intervention can be implemented? Teams make decisions and put together a plan to turn decisions into actions. Actions might involve steps related to:
 - Changing policy or procedures.
 - Providing training.
 - Providing coaching.
 - Improving response.
 - Strengthening family relationships.
 - Working with collaborators.
 - Improving leadership team functioning.
 - Improving data collection and analysis procedures.
 - Addressing other factors related to the issue or concern.
5. **Plan evaluation:** Examine the data (e.g., fidelity of implementation, child data) following implementation of the intervention and determine, has the intervention been effective in supporting the child and creating the expected outcome_or performance?

- If no, are we doing what we say we are doing? In other words, has the intervention been implemented with fidelity (consistently across all routines and activities) or for adequate time or with sufficient intensity?) What's the next step? Cycle through the problem-solving model again.
- If yes, should the intervention continue, be implemented with less intensity, discontinue? What's the next step? Cycle through the problem-solving model again.

Data Expectations and Templates

- Universal Screeners ([Ages and Stages Questionnaire, Ages and Stages Social and Emotional Questionnaire](#))
- [Early MTSS Preliminary Pyramid Assessment](#)
- [UPK Cafe Issue 3: Observation Techniques](#)
- [ABC Blank Chart](#)
- [ABC Data Sheet](#)
- [Universal Intervention Form](#)

Additional Resources

- [UPK Classroom Environments Padlet](#)
- [Vermont Early Learning Standards](#)
- [Head Start Universal Design for Learning](#)
- [Vermont Guiding Principles](#)

Reference

National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations. (2024, November 19). [National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations.](#)