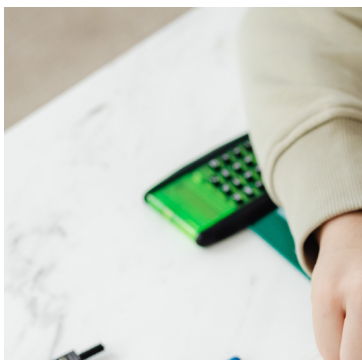


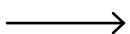


# Bridging the Gap in **MTSS for Mental Health & Behavioral Wellness**

A white paper on the insights from a national survey of administrators, educators, and mental health professionals on the state of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) for mental and behavioral health in schools. This report highlights key findings, challenges, and opportunities for strengthening support systems that promote student well-being.



**Explore More**



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As student mental health persists as a critical issue across the country, schools face increasing pressure to provide effective support systems. Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) offer a structured, school-wide approach to address these needs, yet many schools struggle with implementation. Despite widespread adoption, barriers such as resource limitations, competing priorities and regulatory challenges often lead to fragmented or reactive approaches that fall short of their intended impact.

Move This World and Presence wanted to learn more about what is creating these challenges in schools, so we surveyed administrators, educators and school-based mental health professionals from across the country. We are sharing the insights learned about the challenges and opportunities within existing systems of support. This report aims to inform and empower educational leaders in reforming their approaches, fostering collaboration and building more effective and equitable support structures.

# Universal Concern

The connection between mental health and student success is undeniable. 90% of educators agree that mental health and emotional challenges negatively impact students' ability to learn. Yet, despite this consensus, many schools are struggling to build effective systems to support students' mental and behavioral wellness. Over 60% of educators feel that their MTSS programs for mental health and behavioral wellness are either lacking alignment or have significant room for improvement. Even more concerning, less than 40% feel their schools have the necessary resources to align these supports effectively.

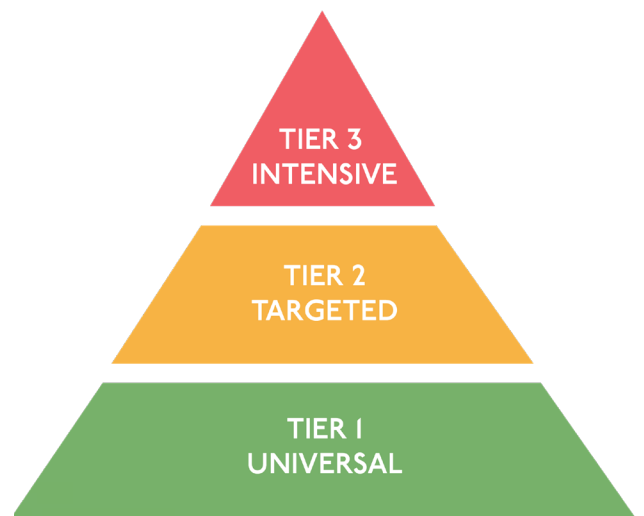
## >60%

**of educators feel that their MTSS programs for mental health and behavioral wellness are either lacking alignment or have significant room for improvement**

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is a framework designed to address students' academic and behavioral needs. Through this framework, schools integrate interventions into a tiered system of support to ensure all students' needs are met.

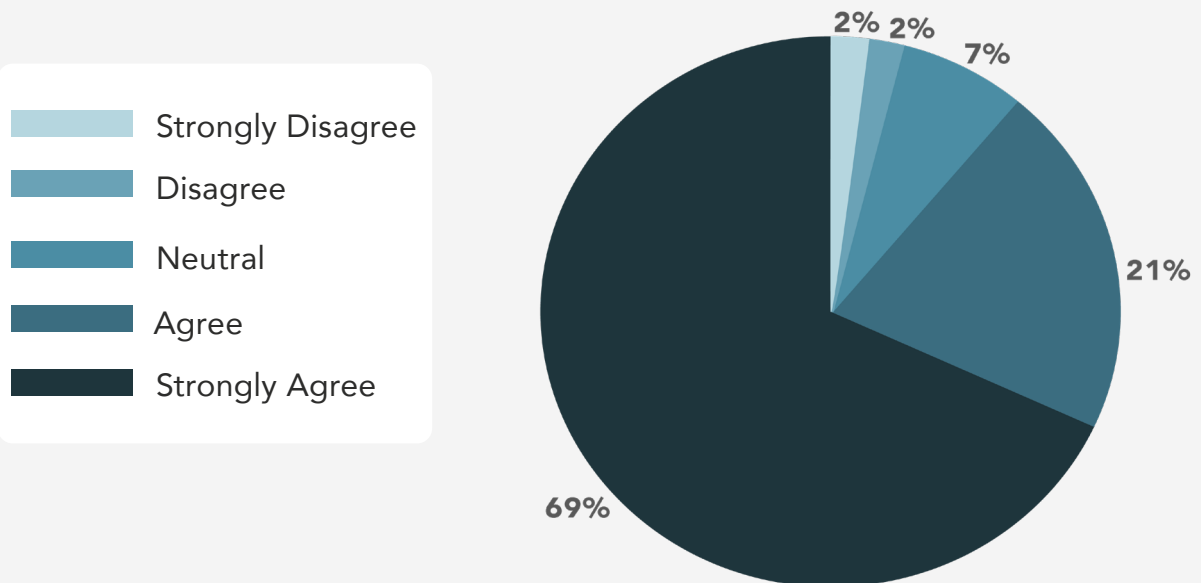
Key components of effective MTSS implementation include:

- Universal screening
- Evidence-based intervention programs and strategies across levels of support
- Ongoing progress monitoring
- Data-based decision making

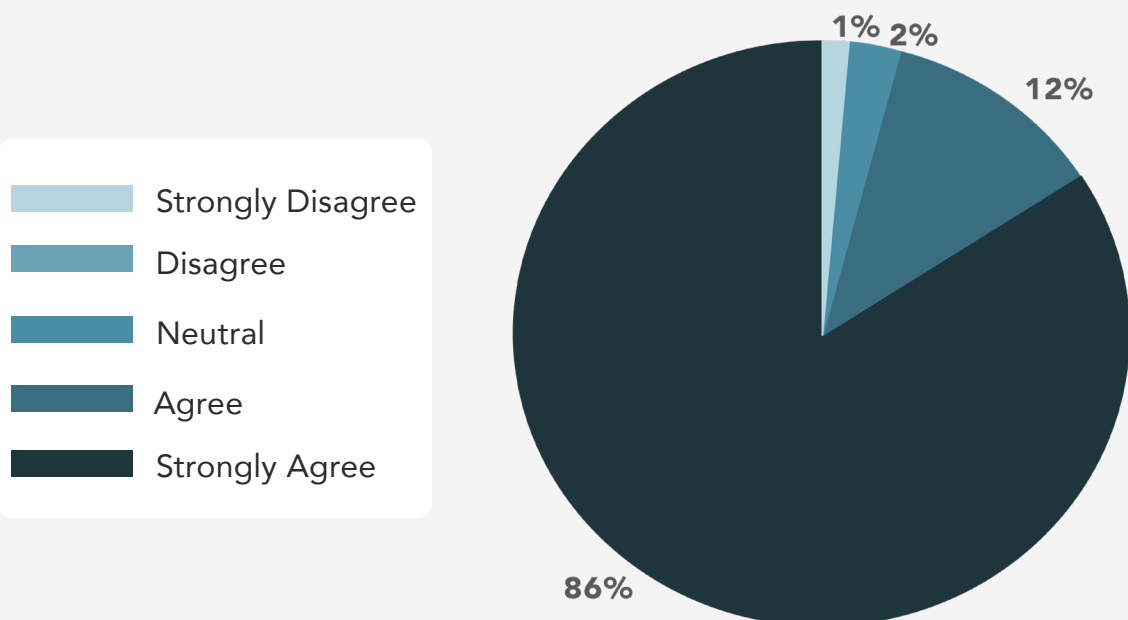


## There seems to be a strong and clear consensus that mental and emotional health is critical to overall student success.

**I see mental health and emotional challenges having a negative impact on students' ability to learn**



**I think mental health and emotional wellness support in schools is important for student success.**



*\*Please note that the values in charts throughout this report may not add up to exactly 100% due to percentages being rounded.*

# Aligning MTSS for Student Success

Schools may have systems of support in place for mental and behavioral health, but many face challenges in effectively integrating these interventions. Without proper alignment and coordination, schools are limited in their ability to create a continuum of care that drives meaningful, system-wide impact.

## This lack of alignment has consequences.

Schools that fail to fully integrate their MTSS frameworks for mental and behavioral health are missing out on the transformative potential of these systems and often lead to environments where we see these common issues\*:

- An unclear MTSS purpose and scope,
- Lack of a common language,
- Lack of documentation, consistent procedures, and communication,
- Lack of collaboration across various professionals in the district,
- Lack of educator capacity to implement the elements of an MTSS structure.

**57%**

**agree or strongly agree that their district or school currently uses an MTSS framework to support mental/behavioral health outcomes of students.**

**37%**

**agree or strongly agree that their district or school has all of the necessary resources needed to integrate and align MTSS resources for mental/behavioral health.**



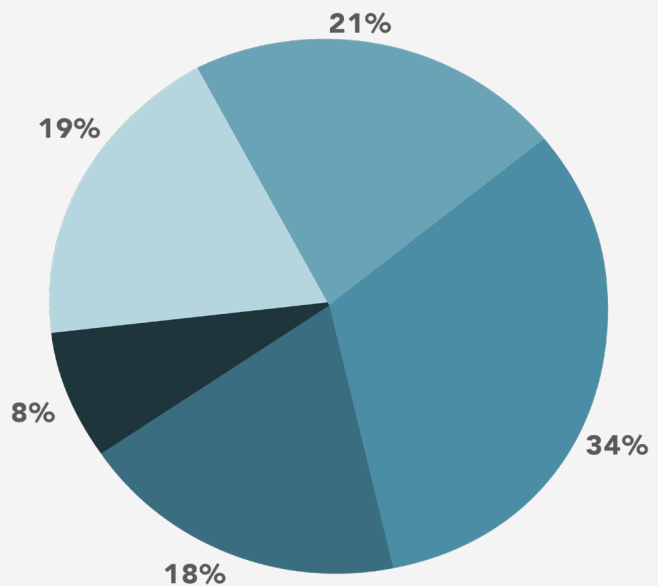
Additionally, tiered supports for mental/behavioral health seem to fall short of academic supports. Schools may have established programs for identifying students in need of academic interventions, providing suitable interventions and progress monitoring. However, the systems in place for mental/behavioral health tend to be less developed.

8%

**strongly agree that their MTSS for mental and behavioral wellness is as robust as their academic supports.**

**I think my district or school's mental/behavioral health tiered supports are as robust as our academic supports.**

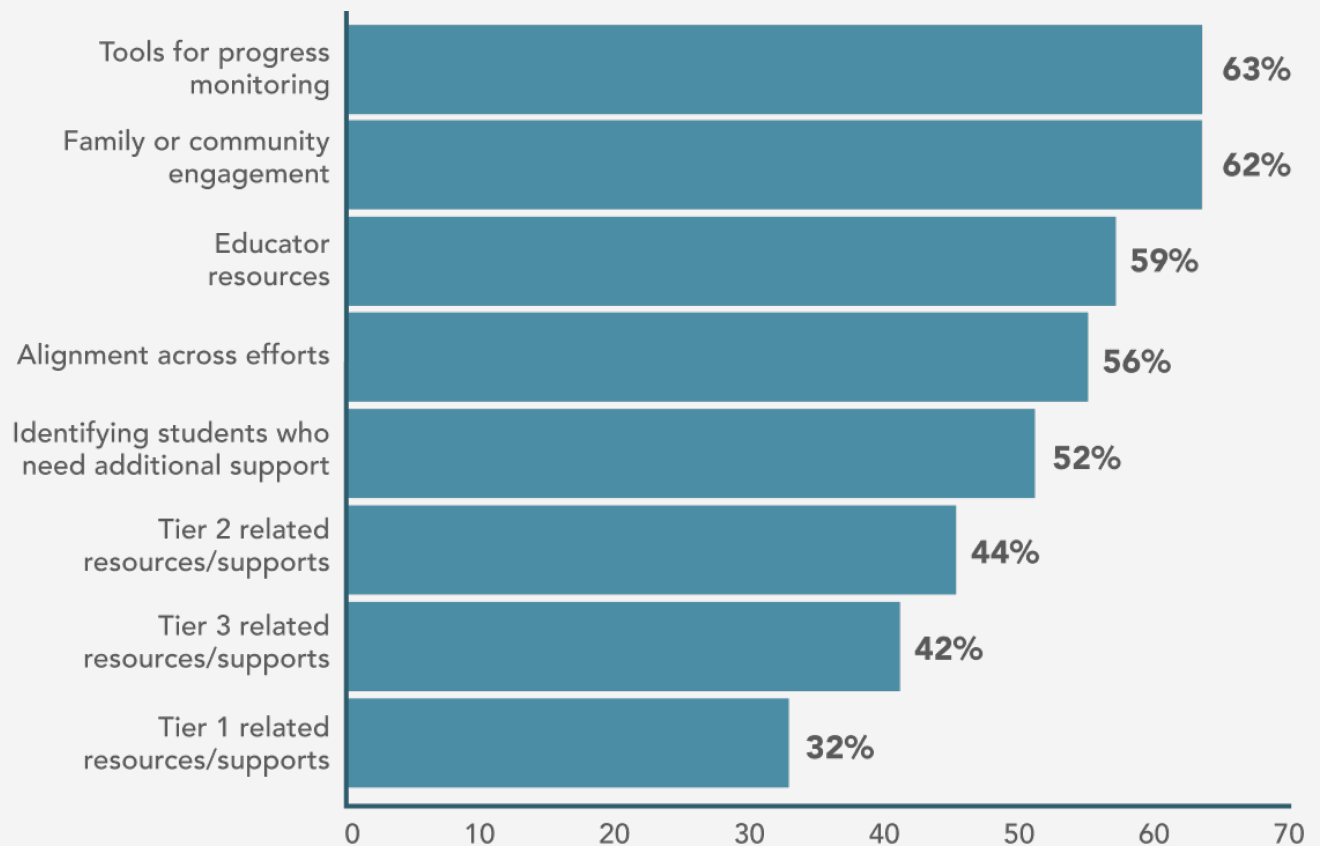
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly Agree



## Schools recognize gaps in systems of support.

In fact, only 29% of respondents indicated that their school or district's mental/behavioral health program was "well aligned" with MTSS. "Well aligned" programs were described as having a variety of resources, programs, and services readily available to students. Nearly 50% indicated that there was room for improvement when it comes to this alignment. These schools or districts may have some resources and programs in place, but have room to improve accessibility, effectiveness or a specific tier of support. Respondents also indicated some of the current gaps that exist in their multi-tiered systems of support.

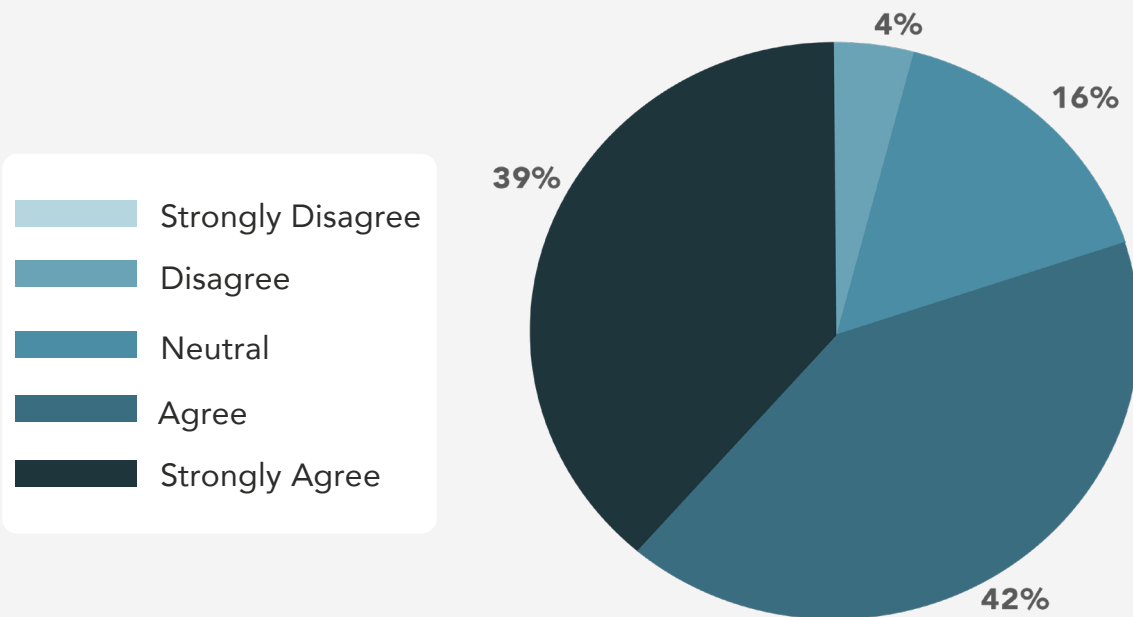
**When it comes to MTSS-related resources for mental/behavioral health, I believe my school/district currently has a gap in (select all that apply):**



## When alignment and resources are in place, the results speak for themselves.

The power of integration and the importance of a coordinated approach across all tiers is demonstrated through success stories. Among educators who report having well-aligned and resourced MTSS programs, 81% say their schools or districts have seen positive outcomes.

### My district or school has seen positive outcomes from integrating and aligning MTSS resources for mental/behavioral health



# 81%

**of educators say their schools or districts have seen positive outcomes from integrating and aligning MTSS resources.**

Efforts aimed at integrating and aligning interventions across tiers also help to ensure that schools are putting their energy towards making the existing systems of support more efficient, rather than adding more interventions and resources to systems that may be inefficient or ineffective.\*

*\*J.B. Vetter et. al, 2024*

# A Clear Path Forward

Schools must prioritize alignment and resource allocation for mental and behavioral wellness within their MTSS frameworks. The data show that:

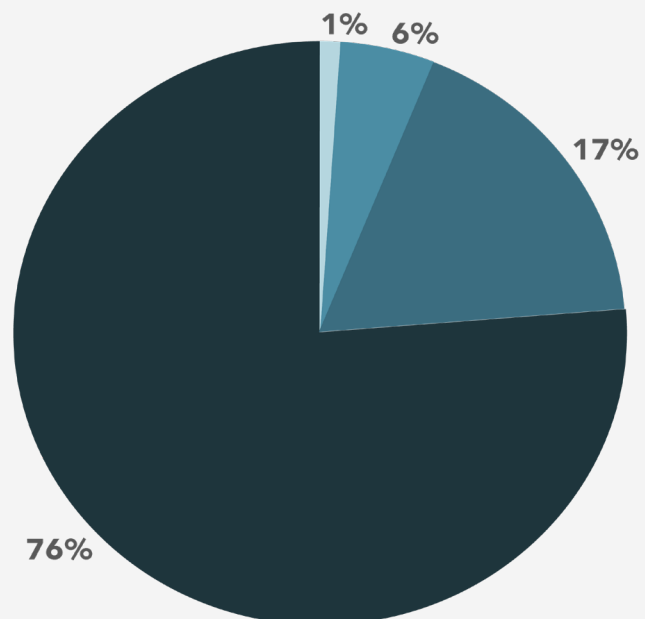
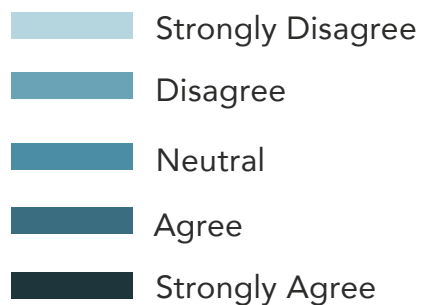
**94%**

**believe alignment of efforts  
and approach across tiers  
for mental/behavioral health  
results in more positive  
outcomes.**

**98%**

**agree that mental health and  
emotional wellness are  
essential for student success.**

**I think alignment of efforts and approach across different tiers for  
mental/behavioral health results in more positive outcomes.**



# Implications & Next Steps

## A roadmap for improving systems.

Mental health is not just a peripheral concern but a foundational aspect of student success. The recognition of its impact on learning, combined with the overwhelming support for providing mental health services, underscores the importance of integrating these supports into the fabric of educational systems. By understanding the barriers that schools currently face, we can begin to take steps to bridge gaps and build more comprehensive and integrated systems of support for students.

Building and maintaining a continuum of care:

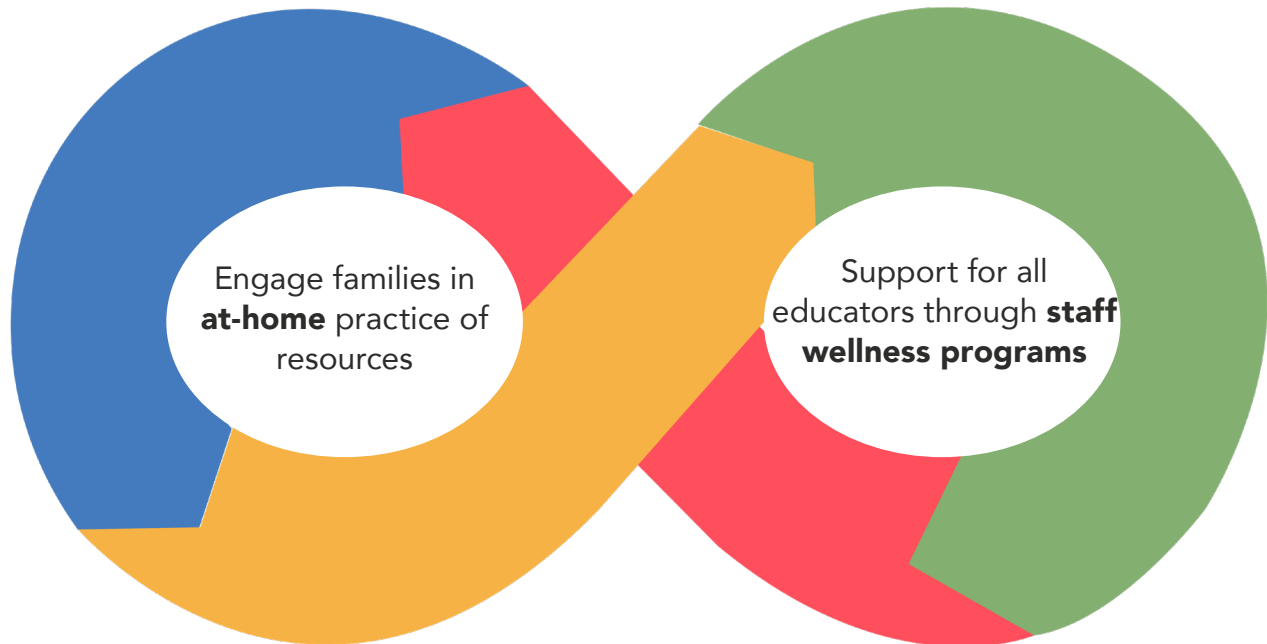
- Provides proactive social skill building
- Enables faster identification of students needing additional support
- Ensures students receive appropriate levels of support and interventions based on their needs
- Creates a shared language for students, administrators, educators and families
- Allows students to transition seamlessly throughout the tiers of the support program without slipping through the cracks



**Schools can prioritize efforts that work towards building a continuum of care for mental and behavioral health, targeting the key areas below:**

Students **learn and practice a common language** around proactive mental/behavioral health skills (Tier 1)

**Individualized, intensive 1:1 support** for students (Tier 3)



Identify students to practice **targeted skill areas** (Tier 2)

**Exit students back into supportive classrooms** and academic environment or assess them for additional clinical care or IEP

## Tier 1: Universal Support

- Implement a Tier 1 curriculum to provide proactive and preventative mental health support
- Ensure all students, staff, and families learn and practice a common language around mental and emotional wellbeing and pro-social behaviors

## Tier 2: Targeted Support

- Identify students who need additional support and practice targeted skills through small-group interventions
- Incorporate the Tier 1 common language across small group work and other supportive settings for students

## Tier 3: Individualized Support

- Provide 1:1 interventions for students with significant mental or behavioral health challenges
- Ensure that counselors, psychologists and all other mental health professionals are familiar and trained on the Tier 1 common language and incorporate it into their interventions and discussions with students

## Family Engagement and Support

- Provide training and resources to families for at-home practice of mental/behavioral health programming
- Ensure families are familiar with the Tier 1 common language so that it can be reinforced at home and across other settings

## Staff Wellness and Support

- Leverage professional learning to educate all staff on resources, programs and Tier 1 common language to support student mental/behavioral health
- Provide staff members emotional resiliency tools to support their personal and professional wellbeing, and ensure they are equipped to lead their students and classrooms effectively

## Exit and Transition Planning

- Transition students back into their classrooms with consistent use of common language and ongoing support
- Assess students for additional clinical care or IEP as needed

By bridging the gaps in alignment and providing the resources schools need, we can empower educators, improve outcomes, and create environments where all students can thrive—academically, emotionally, and beyond.



# Methodology & Respondents

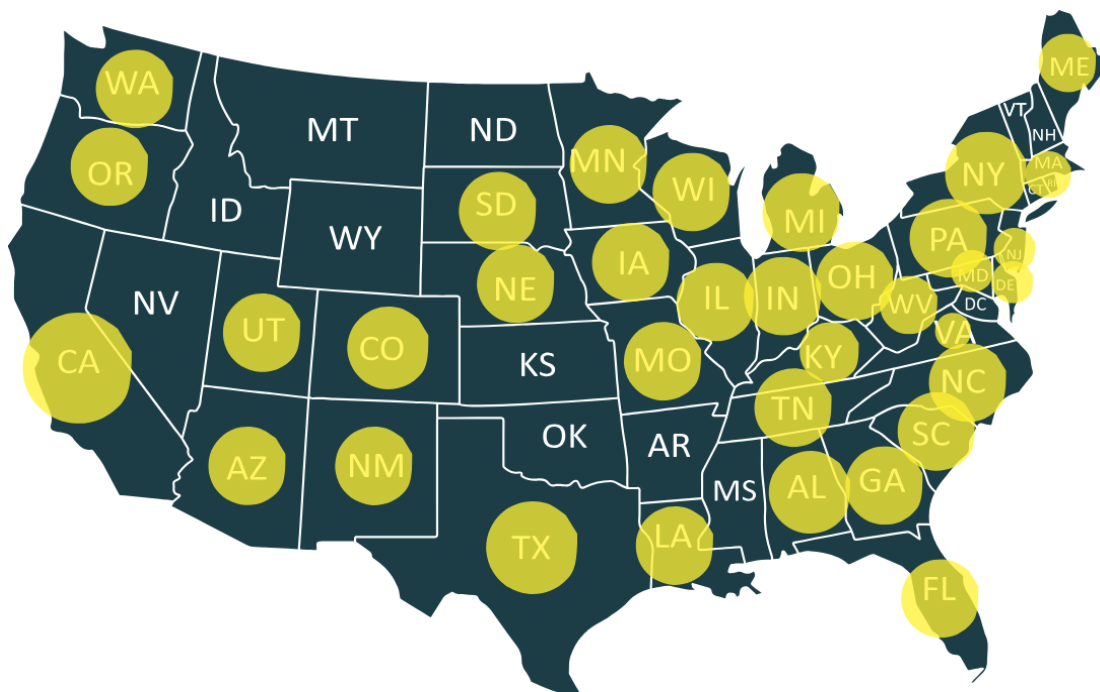
The insights shared were collected in a survey between December 2024 and January 2025.

**Respondents:** A total of 220 respondents participated in the survey

|                     |       |
|---------------------|-------|
| Administrator       | 9.5%  |
| Teacher             | 35.5% |
| Social Worker       | 8.2%  |
| School Psychologist | 13.6% |
| Counselor           | 16.8% |
| Parent              | .9%   |
| Other               | 15.5% |

|           |       |
|-----------|-------|
| Public    | 79.1% |
| Charter   | 16.8% |
| Private   | 1.8%  |
| Parochial | .5%   |
| Unknown   | 1.8%  |

**States Represented** Respondents came from the states highlighted below.



# References

This white paper was inspired directly by “A statewide multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) approach to social and emotional learning (SEL) and mental health,” by James B. Vetter, Shai Fuxman, and Yuxuan Eleanor Dong of the Education Development Center, published in Science Direct. [See the full paper here.](#)

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Vetter, J. B., Fuxman, S., & Dong, Y. E. (2024). A statewide multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) approach to social and emotional learning (SEL) and mental health. *Social and Emotional Learning: Research, Practice, and Policy*, 3, 100046. Vetter, J. B., Fuxman, S., & Dong, Y. E. (2024). A statewide multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) approach to social and emotional learning (SEL) and mental health. *Social and Emotional Learning: Research, Practice, and Policy*, 3, 100046. [See the full paper here](#)

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## Move This World

Move This World is a proactive and preventative mental health platform for students, staff, and families in PreK-12. Its easy-to-implement and MTSS aligned programs deliver thousands of engaging and participatory multimedia experiences that create a common language, support social emotional development, and build stronger school communities where learning thrives. Move This World’s evidence-based results have impacted the lives of over 4 million students across 45 states and 9 countries.

## Presence

As a trusted leader since 2009, Presence is innovating how schools assess and address student special education-related and mental health needs. With over 7 million teletherapy sessions and remote evaluations delivered, and over 10,000 PreK-12 schools supported across the nation, schools look to the experience and expertise of Presence, a pioneer in school-based teletherapy.