

# NC ACCESS BEST PRACTICES



Office of Charter Schools  
**NC ACCESS PROGRAM**  
NC Department of Public Instruction

School Culture

Academic Support

## Tiered Interventions

### Implementation Description

Southwest Charlotte STEM Academy (SCSA) opened in 2019-20 with the mission of providing high quality educational experiences to students and working with families to meet each child's academic, socioemotional, and behavioral needs. "Extensive literature indicates that Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) programs can be effective in helping teachers address academic and behavioral challenges" (Hollingsworth, 2019), so school leadership chose to implement an MTSS framework. They began by hiring a part time MTSS coordinator to launch the program. While the pandemic initially delayed full implementation, the return to in-person instruction during the 2021-22 school year allowed SCSA to implement the program with fidelity. Their efforts are beginning to reap benefits as they track student growth and reach program implementation milestones.

While the [MTSS framework](#) was implemented school-wide and includes all students, there are 35 students, about 5% of the student population, who began the 2021-22 school year with significant needs. Academic progress monitoring is a critical aspect of the MTSS framework and that data was used to identify those students who were not making appropriate academic progress. A Child Study to identify barriers to learning was conducted for this sub-group of students. Prior to each Child Study Meeting, the MTSS coordinator contacts the family to explain the process and solicit input from the parents. Child Study meetings follow the MTSS framework using a problem-solving process. The MTSS team, which consists of the MTSS Coordinator, the classroom teacher, an administrator, counselors and parents or guardians, meets to discuss the problem and work together to determine if interventions are needed and what interventions will be put into place. In order to determine the success of any interventions, progress monitoring data is reviewed weekly and adjustments are made as necessary. Six to eight weeks after the initial child study meeting, the entire team meets with the child's family to discuss progress. If the student is making academic

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### About This School

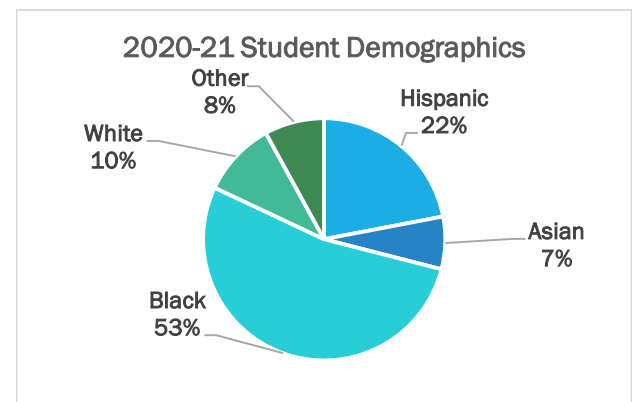
#### Southwest Charlotte STEM Academy

Students at SCSA are immersed in a STEM curriculum daily that allows them to learn in a workshop-model based environment. Southwest Charlotte STEM Academy promotes high academic achievement by increasing student engagement through a workshop model that encourages and empowers students to take ownership of their own learning.

**Year School Opened:** 2019-20

**Grant Awarded:** 2021-22

**Initial Grade Levels Served:** K-8



**% ED Student Population:** 41%

**Urbanicity:** Urban / Charlotte, NC

**Persons in Poverty (Mecklenburg County)<sup>4</sup>:** 11.0%

progress indicating that the interventions are working as expected, they may be exited from the Child Study, but they will continue to be monitored as part of the school wide MTSS. When students do not make academic progress, they may remain in the Child Study with some new interventions or they are referred to the Exceptional Children (EC) coordinator for evaluation, typically resulting in the development of an Individual education Plan (IEP) that outlines individualized learning goals and accommodations to meet the child's specific needs. The MTSS team supported the teachers as they implemented these new strategies making adjustments as needed. Five of the 35 students made significant progress during the 2020-21 school year and were exited from the Child Study, and it is likely that two more will exit before the next school year.



In order to effectively monitor student progress, SCSA used NC ACCESS funds to purchase [iReady](#) which has been a game changer in consistently evaluating student progress. Teachers are able to frequently administer quick formative assessments and use the data and suggested strategies to meet students' needs. The school math interventionist was already very familiar with iReady, so he created instructional videos to familiarize teachers and parents with the tool. The team also began using google sheets to summarize iReady progress monitoring data in a graphical manner creating a visual representation of the data that could be used to support effective communication between the classroom teacher, the family and the MTSS team.

The MTSS framework introduced teachers to instructional strategies intended to address specific student needs. Sometimes teachers need additional professional development to implement these strategies. SCSA school leadership noted that some of their newer kindergarten and first grade teachers needed support with guided reading instruction. Therefore, the school hired [MorphEd](#) with NC ACCESS funding to provide coaching for effective small group guided reading instruction. The school also surveyed staff members to identify which topics interest them. As a result, the leadership team used NC ACCESS funds to contract with [Nixon & Co](#) to provide student behavior management training. In the sessions, teachers learned about the root causes of student behaviors and strategies for developing constructive relationships. Ultimately, these relationships positively impact learning outcomes (Sun, 2021).

## Results

The MTSS framework has facilitated an increase in two way communication with families. The addition of Child Studies to support students who are not making academic progress provides an extra level of support for teachers, families and students when necessary. During a Child Study, parents have formal opportunities to voice concerns, ask questions, and share insights. In turn, parents know the school will address their concerns and communicate their child's progress on a regular basis.

iReady scores rose dramatically over the course of the 202-21 year. At the beginning of the school year, only 29% of students met grade level benchmarks. By mid year, 46% were on grade level, and 55% of students were meeting grade level expectations by the end of the year.

EOG score rose from 46% ELA, 27% Math, 31% Science in the 2020-21 school year to 47% ELA, 43% Math, 71% Science for the 2021-22 school year.

## Challenges

Sometimes stakeholders have misconceptions about the MTSS framework, and it is important to help parents and teachers understand the program, what it is and what it is not. SCSA chose to launch the program by including all students in the process to prevent any possible stigma associated with program participation. The MTSS coordinator facilitated parent information sessions to provide a program overview. Additionally, she communicated with individual families prior to each Child Study to explain next steps and answer questions.

One obstacle school leadership needed to address was communicating expectations about roles and responsibilities in the intervention process. In some cases, teachers felt decreased ownership after making a referral. In response, school leaders provided specialized professional development and developed progress monitoring sheets to help teachers take ownership of the intervention process and more effectively communicate students' progress to the MTSS team and families.

## Future Modifications

In order to continue improving the implementation of MTSS, all staff will be trained at the start of each school year on MTSS and iReady. The school will leverage the teachers who are successfully implementing the MTSS process as experts who can train other teachers. Rather than adding new processes, school leadership plans to focus on refining the current processes and improving the fidelity of MTSS implementation in the coming year.

## Critical Components

### Getting Started

The opportunity to hire a part-time MTSS coordinator was critical to the successful launch of the program. Additionally, selecting iReady as a progress monitoring tool ensured consistent data collection. It was especially helpful to have someone knowledgeable with iReady to help staff interpret the data and use it to adjust their instructional practices.

### Ongoing Supports

Staff members will receive MTSS and iReady training during teacher workdays. Additionally, school leadership will continue to inform parents about the MTSS structure and share individual student progress.

## Equity Connections

MTSS supports an equitable learning environment as teachers administer universal screeners to all students. This consistent data collection ensures students who need additional support are identified in a timely manner and prevents students, especially those of historically marginalized populations, from slipping through the cracks. Data driven decision making within the MTSS framework levels the playing field and promotes educational accessibility for all students (Thurlow, 2020).

## Research

1. Hollingsworth, Sonja M. Dr. (2019). "*Multi-tiered System of Supports as Collective Work: a (Re)structuring Option for Middle Schools*". *Current Issues in Middle Level Education*: Vol. 24 : Iss. 2 , Article 4. DOI: 10.20429/cimle.2019.240204
2. Sun Y (2021). "*The Effect of Teacher Caring Behavior and Teacher Praise on Students' Engagement in EFL Classrooms*". *Front. Psychol.* 12:746871. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.746871
3. Thurlow, M. L., Ghere, G., Lazarus, S. S., & Liu, K. K. (2020, January). "*MTSS for all: Including students with the most significant cognitive disabilities*". Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes/TIES Center.
4. United States Census Bureau. "*Quick Facts North Carolina*". Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NC/PST045219>