

Step 2: Identify the Target Audiences for Communication

Schools and districts can identify which stakeholder groups (i.e., district/school administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, community members, etc.) with whom information will be shared. To assist with this process, schools and districts can use the following questions to generate a comprehensive list of stakeholder groups (Region 15 Comprehensive Center, n.d.):

- Who are the primary audiences (i.e., teachers, parents, students) and the secondary audiences (i.e., school nurses, office staff, security officers, community members)?
- Who will need to know about your NJTSS framework?
- Who is involved with student support/intervention services (i.e., teachers, parents, support staff, students)?

Step 3: Identify the Communication Objectives for Each Target Audience

For example, the communication objective for administrators may be to motivate action toward change by conveying information related to student growth and the successful implementation of NJTSS. For teachers and staff, it may be to change perceptions by increasing understanding about NJTSS implementation. For parents and students, the purpose of communications may be to raise awareness of the range of coordinated interventions available within the NJTSS framework.

Step 4: Identify Which Modes of Communication for Target Audience Will be Most Effective

Certain strategies (i.e., informational briefs for school and district leadership or parent-teacher conferences for sharing specific student outcome data with parents) may only be utilized for certain groups. On the other hand, other strategies (i.e., district website, email, newsletters) may be used to communicate information to multiple groups. It is recommended that a multi-modal approach be utilized to increase the effectiveness of communication efforts. In this capacity, it is recommended that schools and districts explore which platforms and products are preferred modes of communication for each target audience group. For example, parents may prefer social media, whereas school personnel may prefer email.

Another thing to consider is whether the message you convey matches the platform. Social media may be more suited for news or upcoming events. In contrast, a newsletter can provide updates in multiple areas, such as information about the school's or district's NJTSS implementation progress, while at the same time highlighting the program's success and improvements in student outcomes. Schools have the agency to adapt their communication strategies depending on the modality they are using to communicate with a target audience.

A last area to consider is the availability of resources, as some strategies require more than others. Social media is quick and inexpensive, whereas hosting an open house to share information with parents will likely require more planning time and costs associated with staffing the event or providing childcare so parents can attend. Below is a list of common communication strategies to consider:

- **Digital Tools:** District website, email, social media apps, parent/staff portal, videos, webinars, virtual meetings.
- **Print Materials:** Newsletter, fact sheets, flyers, brochures or pamphlets, info briefs, reports.
- **In-Person Events:** Faculty meetings, parent workshops, information sessions, presentations, briefings, and professional development.

The degree to which these communication strategies are effective will largely depend on how the information is conveyed in relation to tone and sensitivity and how receptive different stakeholders are to each of the strategies. In terms of tone and sensitivity, messages can be conveyed positively to build community and sustain partnerships. Districts and schools should be mindful of cultural differences in language use and expression. In terms of receptivity, the communication strategy selected should engage stakeholders. For example, a district may decide to switch to conveying information via social media once they learn that parents are not reading school emails but are responding to updates and communicating through their social media accounts.

Establishing Norms & Expectations for Ongoing Staff Communications

School Staff Communications by Implementation Stage

As previously mentioned, in addition to ongoing communications as part of standardized procedures, there is also a need for ongoing communication about the district's NJTSS implementation efforts. To ensure that these communications happen promptly, it is recommended that districts link these communications to the specific implementation stages (i.e., exploration and development, installation, initial implementation, full implementation, and continuous improvement) previously discussed in [Section 5](#) of the manual. Each stage will require tailored communication strategies to ensure clarity, engagement, and progress. As such, using each implementation stage as a guide, districts can establish norms for when and what types of information are shared and hold themselves accountable for ensuring timely communications. In addition, districts can clearly organize and articulate information based on the expectations embedded within each implementation stage. Thus, the content and methods of communication will evolve across the various stages of NJTSS implementation (Farmer et al., 2023). Refer to [Section 5](#) for a detailed overview of the implementation stages.

Exploration & Development

During the exploration phase, districts evaluate the feasibility and potential benefits of adopting an NJTSS framework. Communication at this stage can prioritize engaging key stakeholders and building awareness about NJTSS. District leadership can provide educators and key stakeholders with clear, accessible information on what NJTSS is, its benefits, and the requirements for implementation. Modes of communication may include professional development sessions, memos, emails, newsletters, and stakeholder meetings.

Engagement efforts should extend to all parties invested in the success of the program—administrators, educators, parents, students, and community members. Their input is vital in shaping the district's understanding of the community's needs and concerns. Fostering these relationships early establishes shared ownership, builds trust, and generates the buy-in necessary for successful implementation (Weingarten et al., 2020; Forman & Crystal, 2015; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010).

Installation

The installation phase begins once the district adopts NJTSS and transitions into planning and preparation. Communication during this stage can focus on disseminating information about the next steps and facilitating the formation of NJTSS teams at the district and school levels.

Building principals and district administrators share updates and decisions through various channels, including staff meetings, open board meetings, letters, emails, and newsletters. NJTSS teams organize and deliver training for teachers and other school staff on essential processes such as data collection, data-based decision making, student referral protocols, and tiered support (Eagle et al., 2015).

Engagement with teachers and other school staff can continue to address potential resistance, invite feedback, and solve emerging challenges collaboratively. These efforts lay the groundwork for smooth implementation by ensuring all stakeholders are prepared and aligned with the district's vision (Forman & Crystal, 2015).

Initial Implementation

In the implementation phase, the NJTSS framework begins to take shape in practice. Educators actively use student data to inform decisions about academic, emotional, and behavioral supports, while students begin to receive interventions aligned with their needs.

Staff, students, and key stakeholders should remain informed about ongoing program developments and expectations (Eagle et al., 2015). When developmentally appropriate, students should receive clear guidance on how NJTSS may impact their academics, course offerings, or school environment, and information about available support should be easily accessible.

District leadership should establish feedback loops to facilitate continuous communication between district and building-level teams (Baker et al., 2022). Regularly scheduled district meetings can focus on reviewing data and assessing program effectiveness, while building-level discussions with staff can identify classroom-level successes and areas for improvement. These efforts allow districts to refine their practices and align future goals with identified needs.

Full Implementation

The full implementation stage signals the point at which new practices have been integrated into staff, organizational, and community practices, policies, and procedures. At this time, the NJTSS framework is fully operational, supported, and adopted into the district's and schools' daily operations. Essentially, all aspects of the model are working as planned. Student outcomes and school improvements can also be anticipated at this stage. Districts can use evaluation data collected throughout the year and annually to assess the outcomes. Communication at this stage should focus on reporting student outcomes, school improvements, and the overall successful implementation of the NJTSS framework (Harlacher et al., 2014).

Continuous Improvement

The continuous improvement stage centers on sustainability. At this stage, district/school leadership works with key stakeholders to ensure the long-term survival and continued effectiveness of the NJTSS framework. Through ongoing data analysis, identifying areas for growth, and a clear understanding of key contextual factors (i.e., change in leadership, staffing, funding streams, new mandates, etc.), districts and schools determine when and where adjustments are needed (Fixen et al., 2009). School leadership communicates information promptly and transparently when adjustments or programmatic changes are made.

Communication strategies at this stage include comprehensive reports shared with the superintendent, central administration, and building principals. However, dissemination to teachers, students, and parents can be tailored to actionable insights relevant to their roles. Through systematic evaluation and transparent communication, districts can sustain NJTSS implementation and ensure it continues to meet the evolving needs of students and stakeholders.

Table 6.3: Modes of Communication by Implementation Stage

Phase	Description of Phase	Modes of communication
Exploration & Development	The district explores the feasibility and potential benefits of adopting an NJTSS model before adopting it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional development sessions Staff meetings Staff memos Newsletters Emails Public board meetings
Installation	The school/district has committed to NJTSS and begun comprehensive implementation planning. NJTSS teams are formed, and foundational training is provided to staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letters/emails to staff Staff memos School website updates Morning announcements Public board meetings
Initial Implementation	NJTSS programming and systems are being implemented. Educators use student data to make decisions. Students begin receiving academic, emotional, and behavioral support, and feedback loops are established.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data sharing sessions with building leaders Effort/outcome reports are shared with NJTSS teams Regular staff meetings Newsletters School and district website updates Fidelity data shared with building leaders NJTSS teams share outcome data with educators

Phase	Description of Phase	Modes of communication
Full Implementation	The focus shifts to the full operation of the NJTSS framework and the integration of practices within daily district and school operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data sharing sessions with district and building leaders • Outcome reports are shared with NJTSS teams • NJTSS teams share outcome data with educators • Newsletters • School and district website updates
Continuous Improvement	The focus now becomes sustainability. Districts/schools engage in the ongoing process of analyzing data, identifying areas for growth, and adjusting the NJTSS framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual and mid-year evaluation reports • Information briefs • Information sessions during September professional development days • Superintendent, central administration, and building principal briefings • Building-level data reviews.

Establishing Norms and Expectations for Ongoing Family and Community Communications During NJTSS Implementation

The active involvement of families and community members is essential to successfully implementing an NJTSS framework. These critical stakeholders possess invaluable knowledge about students and the community that should be used to inform the planning and execution of interventions (Weingarten et al., 2020; Sheridan et al., 2012; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Their voices should be intentionally and prominently included throughout all phases of NJTSS implementation. Community partners, such as local agencies, businesses, colleges and universities, and health care providers, can offer additional resources to support students, families, and educators (Garcia et al., 2016). Schools can establish positive relationships with these external service providers, creating trusted networks for connecting students to medical care, mental health support, and structured learning experiences outside school. Schools can consider how to engage and strengthen family and community partnerships by developing pathways for communicating pertinent information about their NJTSS frameworks. To foster this partnership, it is crucial to provide families and community members with opportunities to share their perspectives, ask questions, and give feedback.

For families, what is communicated and how it is communicated will evolve across each of the tiers as the need for support moves from the universal level (all parents) to the targeted level (some parents) to the individual level (a few parents) of intervention. For each tier of the NJTSS framework, districts and schools can develop a communication plan for parents/caregivers that prioritizes what information is conveyed and modalities that will be utilized for each tier. For example, a simple way to ensure that all parents are aware of the NJTSS framework and the different levels of support available is to create a brief guide with key definitions, explanations of NJTSS tiers, an overview of the needs identification process, and how parents will be notified when interventions are needed. Schools can also utilize events like back-to-school nights, open houses, and parent-teacher conferences to share information with parents in person and answer any questions. Below is an example of the kind of information that might be shared about NJTSS during a presentation at back-to-school night or parent-teacher conferences.

When students have been identified for additional support, parent notification letters are utilized to communicate with specific parents and convey how a student was identified and what interventions are being recommended. By developing user-friendly resources and pathways for communication with parents, regardless of the level of support needed, districts and schools work to maintain open lines of communication. The table below provides examples of actionable steps that can be taken to engage families and communities throughout the NJTSS implementation process.

Table 6.4: Active Family and Community Engagement Steps

Tier	Active Family and Community Engagement Steps
Tier 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information about the school's NJTSS framework (e.g. develop a guide for families and community members, post information on the school website). • Get to know families and community members early in the school year (e.g. at conferences, back-to-school nights). • Develop a system for ongoing multidirectional communication (e.g. newsletter, plan for sharing progress updates). • Invite families and community members to share their feedback, questions, and concerns. • Notify families of screening practices and data uses. • Share screening data with families during conferences and community members during partnership meetings.
Tier 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide families with written notice that the student is receiving an intervention. • Communicate with the family (in person or by phone) to explain the intervention and the progress monitoring plan. • Share progress monitoring data with families at least quarterly and discuss the data with families at conferences. • Collaborate with community providers/partners to identify, develop and implement interventions.
Tier 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite families and community providers to participate in an intervention planning meeting. • Provide multiple meeting formats (e.g. in person, phone, video conference) and offer meeting times outside the regular workday. • Encourage family members to share their concerns and perspectives on student needs. • Share progress monitoring data at least monthly and discuss the student's progress with their family and community providers.

Adapted from Weingarten, Zumeta Edmonds, and Arden (2020)

By integrating these strategies into communication plans, districts and schools can build strong, collaborative relationships with families and community members that enhance the effectiveness of the NJTSS framework and improve outcomes for all students.

Best Practices for Family and Community Engagement

Effective communication with families and community members is a cornerstone of improving engagement within the NJTSS framework (Weingarten et al., 2020). To ensure that families and community members are informed and engaged, districts and schools must adopt inclusive and accessible strategies to foster meaningful partnerships and align efforts to support student success (Weist et al., 2017). Below are a few best practices that will improve accessibility and work to eliminate barriers to engagement.

Language Accessibility

Communication materials should reflect the linguistic diversity of the district's population. Messaging can consistently appear in at least two or more languages commonly spoken within the district, such as English and Spanish. This ensures families can access critical information about NJTSS initiatives and activities regardless of language barriers.

Culturally Focused Communication

Understanding the cultural and logistical needs of families and community members is critical for effective communication:

- **Timing and Accessibility:** Recognize that working parents, single caregivers, and other community members may face challenges attending events during standard work hours or evenings.
- **Support Services:** Provide free childcare during workshops or meetings to encourage attendance.
- **Alternative Options:** Offer virtual or phone meeting options for parents or community members who cannot attend in person and share recorded sessions or summaries for those unable to join live events.

Use of Non-Technical Language

Educators should avoid technical jargon and acronyms to build positive relationships and foster clear communication with parents and community members. It is essential to recognize the diverse backgrounds of parents and community members. Their level of understanding and ability to navigate school communications can vary greatly. Clarity and simplicity are critical whether the communication is via email, a flyer, or a face-to-face interaction. Tailoring communication to meet families' needs ensures messages are understood and relationships are strengthened.

Translation Services

District and school leadership can proactively assess the language needs of families and community members and consider offering translation or interpretation services as necessary. Educators can directly ask families about their preferred language for communication to ensure accessibility. Hiring professional translators or utilizing student support staff members, such as school psychologists, counselors, or case managers, is preferred over relying on school staff, teachers, students, or family members, as it avoids conflicts of interest and maintains confidentiality (Bartley, 2020).

To minimize barriers, districts can adopt flexible and family-centered approaches:

- Schedule meetings and events at varied times to accommodate different schedules.
- Provide multiple methods for parents to access event information, such as digital recordings, follow-up summaries, or printed material sent home.
- Ensure that all communication methods comply with accessibility requirements and are tailored to meet the diverse needs of families in the district.

By implementing inclusive strategies, district and school leadership can strengthen family and community engagement within the NJTSS framework. Effective communication supports a level of understanding about a district's NJTSS framework and builds trust and collaboration, ensuring that every student receives the support they need.

Readers are referred to [Appendix 6](#) for sample parent letters for explaining the NJTSS Framework, communicating when students need additional supports, and informing parents when goals have been met and supports are no longer needed.

Key Takeaways

- Effective NJTSS implementation requires strategic, continuous communication across all phases—from exploration to full implementation. Regular updates help build shared understanding and foster sustained stakeholder engagement.
- Communication strategies must be tailored to specific stakeholder groups (e.g., educators, families, community partners). Using accessible language for families, avoiding jargon, and considering cultural and linguistic needs enhances clarity and trust.
- The content and focus of communication should evolve depending on the district's or school's NJTSS stage. Early stages may focus on awareness and rationale, while later stages focus on outcomes, progress updates, and sustainability efforts.
- Communication should not be one-directional. Districts and schools can build in mechanisms for feedback, such as surveys, meetings, or listening sessions, to ensure stakeholders feel heard and valued.
- Developing a clear plan with prioritized goals, timelines, responsible individuals, and consistent messaging tools ensures that communications are timely, purposeful, and aligned across the system.

Additional Resources

- [The New Jersey Tiered System of Supports \(NJTSS\)](#)
- [NJTSS-Early Reading](#)
- [New Jersey Literacy Framework](#)
- [New Jersey Positive Behavior Support in Schools](#)
- [Behavioral Supports and Interventions-Special Education](#)
- [New Jersey Comprehensive School-Based Mental Health Resources Guide](#)