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SUCCESS STORY

Strengthening Student Success Through Integrated Tier 1 and Tier 2 Supports

Norman Public Schools (NPS) is a K–12 district serving approximately 16,000 students in 25 school sites just south of Oklahoma City. As the MTSS/Prevention Coordinator for NPS, Lori Hollingsworth oversees prevention and helps individual schools develop a comprehensive multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) for their building.

Currently, all PreK through Grade 8 classrooms use Second Step® programs to strengthen human skills across the district. But Second Step instruction in NPS is hardly a new experiment. “When I first started teaching, we were teaching the physical curriculum binders,” Lori reflects. “Second Step’s been around as long as I have in Norman.”

Today, Second Step programs help create a consistent foundation for student belonging, learning readiness, and support across every PreK through Grade 8 campus in the district.

Situation

Like many districts, Norman Public Schools sought to improve attendance, reduce behavior challenges, strengthen learning readiness, and deepen students’ sense of belonging. “When students are

dysregulated, when they don’t feel like they belong or don’t feel connected, they’re not going to be ready to learn,” Lori explains. “That has to be step zero in any education setting.”

As part of their holistic approach, district leaders also sought to improve family engagement, strengthen educator buy-in, and make it easier for staff to consistently deliver instruction within busy school schedules.

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—Lori Hollingsworth
MTSS/Prevention Coordinator
Norman Public Schools

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Finding a Tier 2 Solution

With Second Step® programs in place for universal Tier 1 instruction, Norman Public Schools was ready to expand its human skills instruction to support students with additional needs. District leaders wanted a screening process that would help them quickly identify students who could benefit from targeted intervention and connect them with support before challenges escalated.

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When students feel valued and part of a community, when they truly feel like they belong, they can relax. Their brains can settle in and be ready to learn.



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Approach

A Focus on Human Skills and Belonging

The goal of Norman Public Schools is to create a districtwide culture where student well-being is a foundational priority. The district's six strategic pillars, which are well-known to every educator in every school site, reflect that commitment. “One of those six pillars is building a culture of belonging,” Lori says. “It’s making sure that everyone who enters our buildings, no matter what school site, feels seen, heard, and valued. We’re thankful that Second Step programs provide that tool.”

NPS tracks districtwide perceptions of belonging through surveys done with students, parents, community, and staff. Belonging ties directly to the learning readiness, attendance, and behavior concerns mentioned above.

Building on this foundation, NPS has developed a consistent implementation model across all schools.

Second Step digital programs are taught in every K–8 classroom, while PreK classrooms use the Second Step® Early Learning classroom kit. Elementary students receive instruction in their homerooms at least once each week, while middle school students participate during advisory periods.

This consistency ensures students receive a shared experience and common language around human skills, regardless of which school they attend.

Tier 2 Approach: Additional Support, Not Different Support

In implementing Second Step Tiered Interventions this year, Lori and district leaders emphasized the importance of framing Tier 1 and Tier 2 as complementary systems, not alternatives to one or the other. “Tier 2 doesn’t mean ‘something else,’” Lori says. “You’re not throwing Tier 1 out the window. It means ‘in addition to.’ You’re providing additional support, not necessarily different support. I’ve appreciated having Tiers 1 and 2 in the same platform so nobody feels like they have to find another resource.”

Through behavioral and mental health screeners, site teams identify students who could benefit most from targeted, Tier 2 support. Behavior technicians then pull small groups from class and teach the Second Step Tier 2 lessons.

Because Second Step Tier 2 instruction is aligned with the same human skills students are already learning in the classroom, support feels familiar and reinforces existing learning rather than introducing an entirely separate framework.

Outcomes

Stronger Attendance and More Consistent Student Support

Through consistent Second Step implementation across schools, Norman Public Schools has seen improvements in lesson completion and student attendance. Last school year alone, the district saw a 1% increase in attendance.

The district has also seen evidence of the connection between implementation fidelity and

student outcomes. When one school counselor compared behavior referral data with Second Step® lesson completion rates, a clear pattern emerged: classrooms with the highest number of behavior referrals were also the classrooms that had fallen behind on lessons focused on cooperation, empathy, and problem-solving. The finding reinforced the value of strong Tier 1 instruction and helped school teams prioritize getting classrooms back on track before introducing additional interventions.

Leveling Up Tiered Interventions

The district's investment in a connected Tier 1 and Tier 2 system has also helped schools provide more targeted support. With strong universal human skills instruction in place across PreK through Grade 8, site teams can more easily distinguish students who are struggling situationally from those who need more targeted intervention. This allows students to receive the right support at the right time. Behavior technicians delivering small group instruction have embraced the ready-to-teach Second Step Tier 2 curriculum because it connects directly to what students are already learning in the classroom.

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Those skills will help them not only now, as a student, but also in the future in the workforce. Being able to effectively communicate their needs and feelings can help them in so many areas, even outside of their K-12 experience.



—Lori Hollingsworth
MTSS/Prevention Coordinator
Norman Public Schools

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Beyond the Data

For Norman Public Schools, belonging isn't a standalone initiative. It's the foundation that supports learning, attendance, behavior, and long-term student success. By aligning Tier 1 instruction and Tier 2 intervention around the shared Second Step framework, the district has created a more consistent approach to helping every student feel seen, supported, and ready to learn.

Ready to bring these results to your school or district?

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