# Beyond Phone Bans:

## How Districts are Using MTSS to Prepare Students for Healthy Technology Use

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Since 1958, Education Development Center (EDC) has collaborated with public and private partners to advance education and health solutions in communities across the globe.

**EDC's Healthy Digital Futures initiative helps young people thrive as digital media and AI transform how they learn, live, connect, and play.**

It emphasizes connecting efforts across places where technology shapes people's lives: schools and workplaces, families and communities, health systems and digital environments, all grounded in evidence about what helps young people thrive. Efforts include:

- Building human capacity, alongside technology skills
- Shape environments for healthy digital lives
- Use and translate evidence into practical guidance



https://edc.org/our-work/healthy-digital-futures/

# Today's Session



- Defining digital wellness
- Why look at digital wellness in the context of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)?
- What does the process of applying the MTSS framework to digital wellness look like?
- What did we learn from 3 school districts that piloted this approach?



# Shifting the Balance

# Commonly Used Terms



**Digital Safety**

Staying protected online by keeping personal information secure and avoiding scams, harm, or unsafe situations



**Digital Media Literacy**

The ability to find, understand, evaluate, and use online information and tools effectively



**Digital Citizenship**

Using technology responsibly, respectfully, and ethically when interacting with others online



**Digital Wellness**

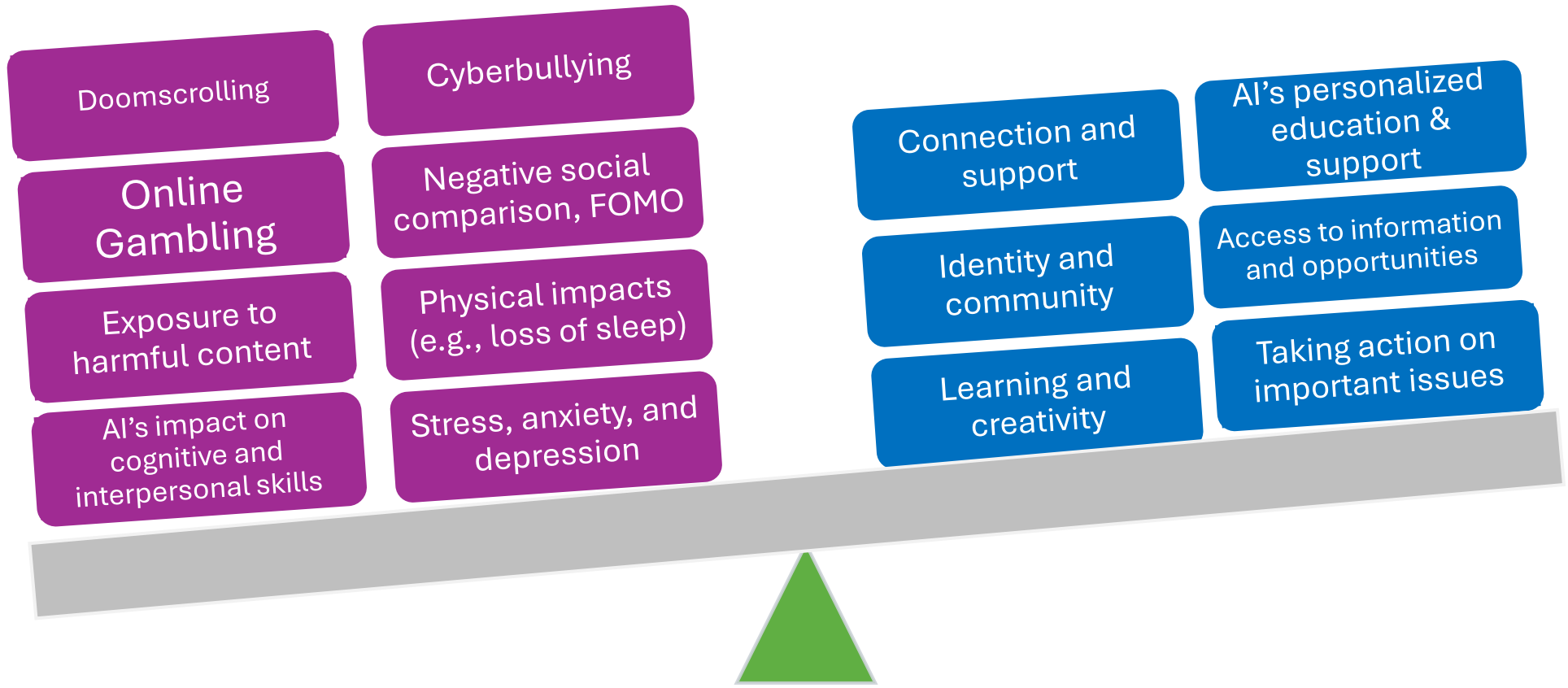
Intentional and balanced use of digital media and technology to support young people's health, well-being, relationships, learning, and growth.

# Elements of Digital Wellness…

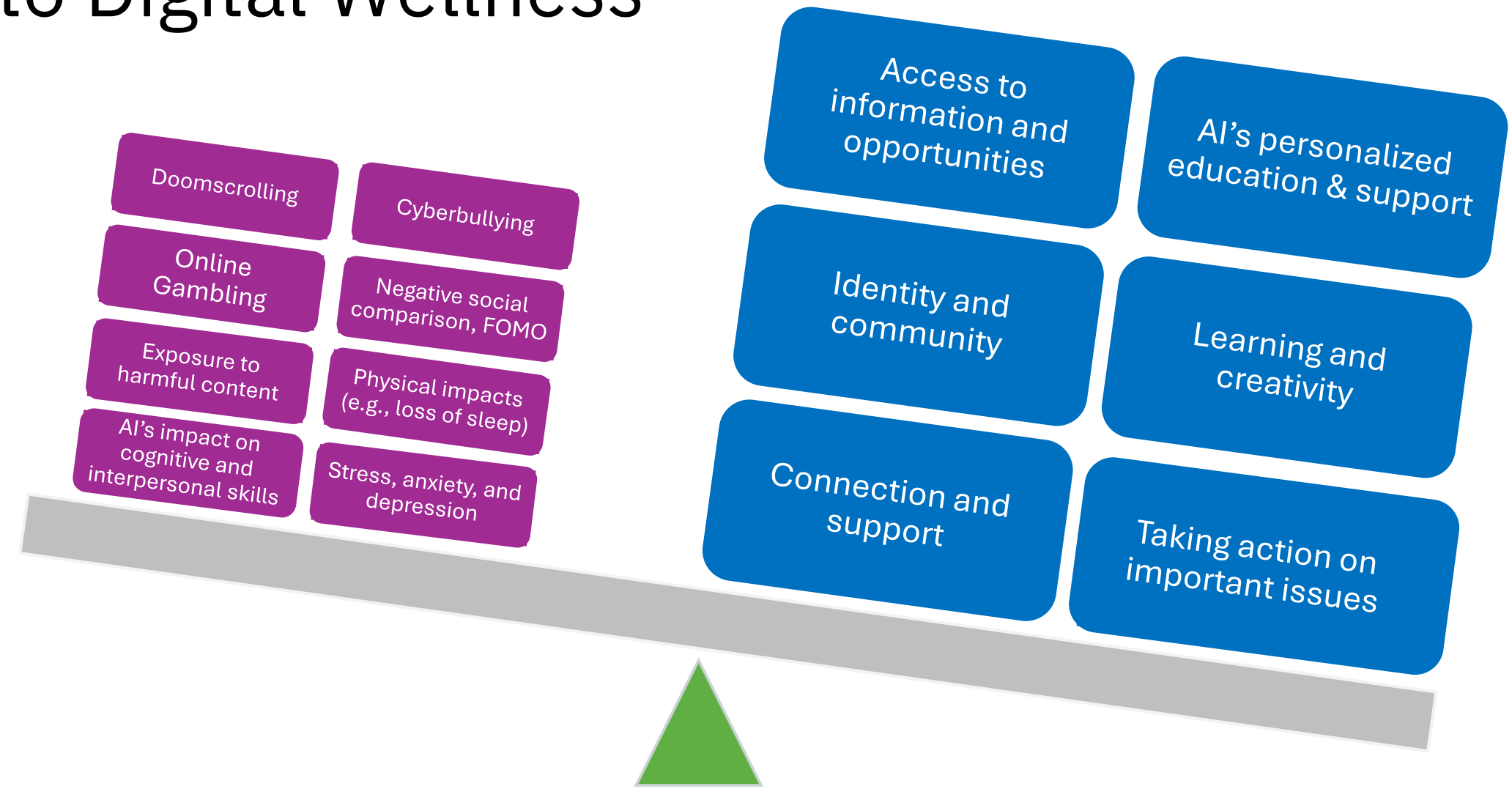



… and more!

# Shifting the Balance from Digital Harms…



# ...to Digital Wellness





# Multi-Tiered Systems of Support to Promote Digital Wellness

# Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is an evidence-based framework to ensure every student has the support they need to learn and thrive. MTSS uses data and ongoing progress monitoring to identify needs early, match students with appropriate supports, and adjust interventions based on how well they work.

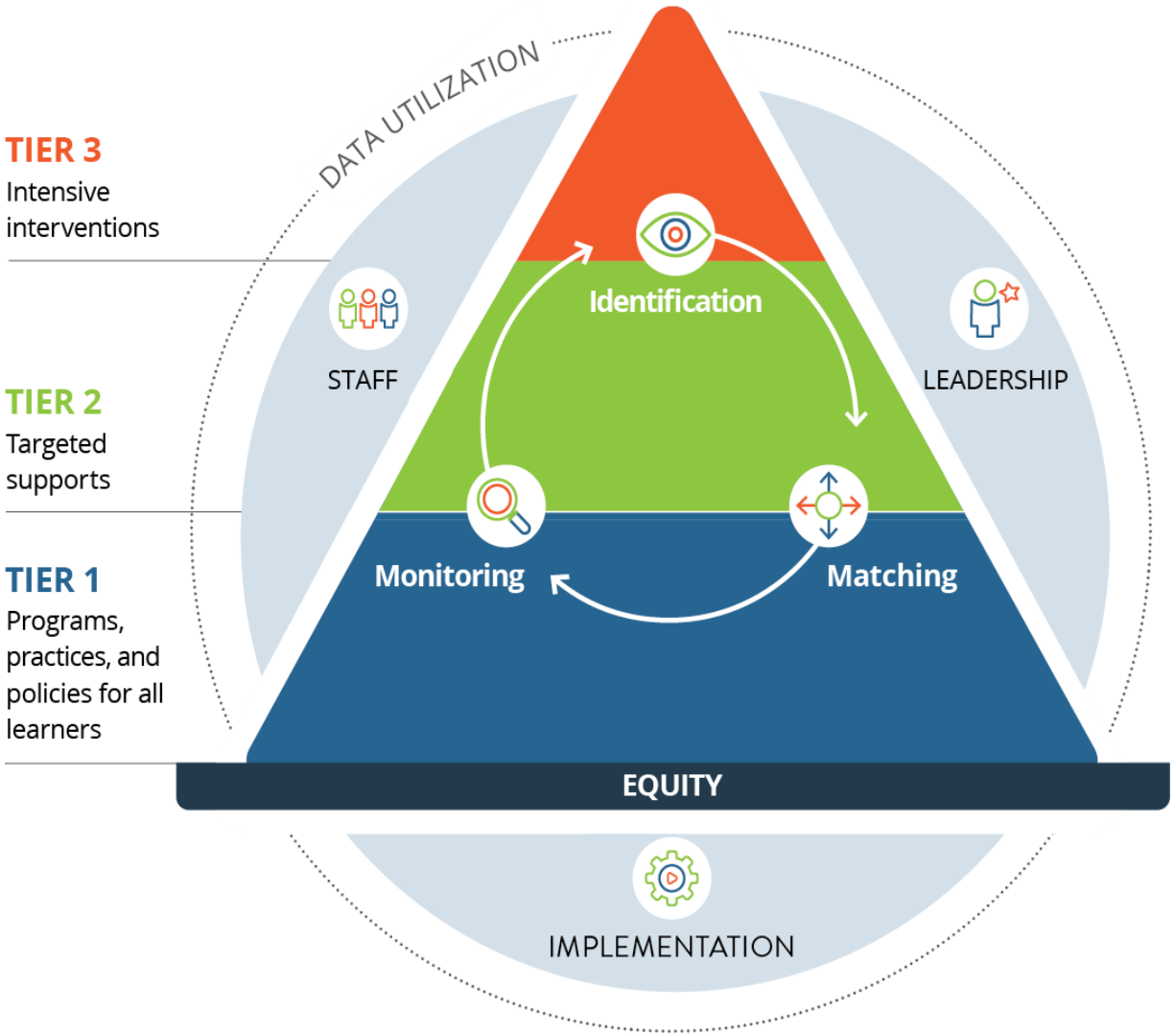


**EDC Solutions** offers **schools** and **districts** supports to improve the **wellbeing** and **address the mental and behavioral health** of students and educators through:

- MTSS Support (assessment, planning, implementation)
- Professional Development
- Consultation

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# Elements of MTSS




(Education Development Center, Social Emotional Behavior Academy, 2024)

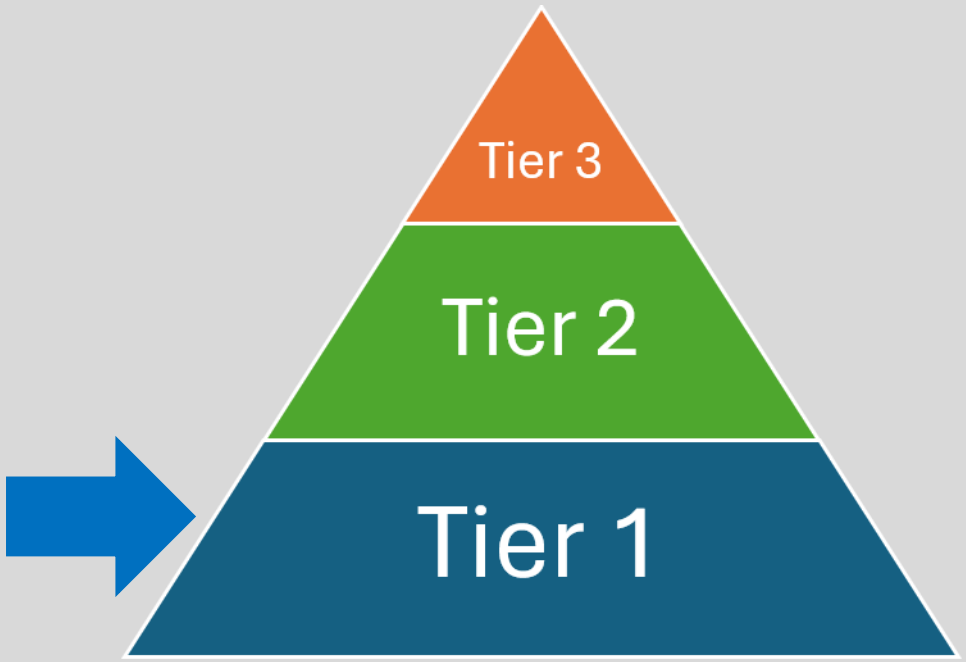
# Why Apply MTSS to Digital Wellness?

- Young people have varying needs when it comes to digital wellness. It is critical to provide appropriate supports for *every* student.
- Promoting digital wellness requires a systemic, integrated, coordinated approach.
- MTSS provides a framework for identifying gaps and prioritizing strategies.
- There is evidence of the effectiveness of the MTSS approach in other areas.



# Tier 1
# Universal Practices

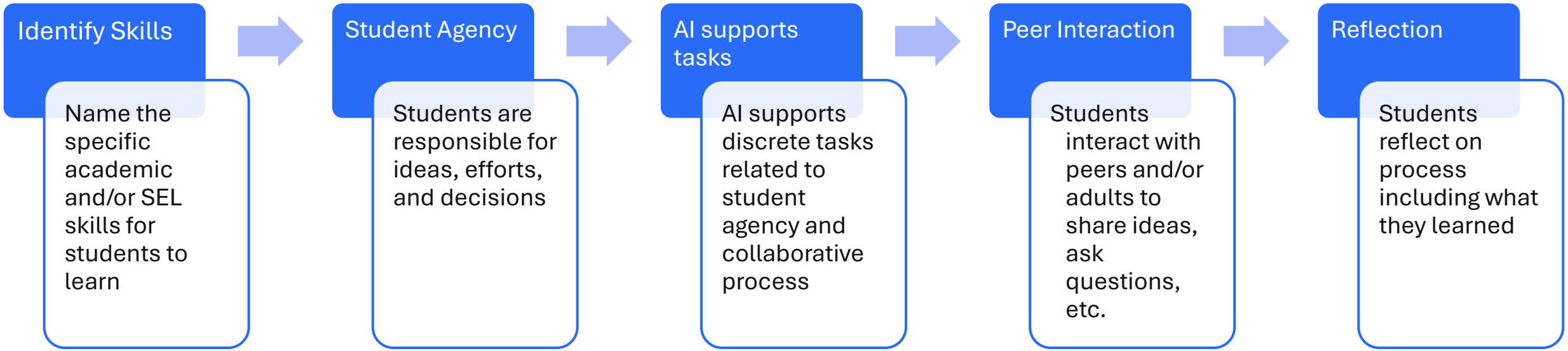
Classroom and whole school programs, policies, and practices for all students




## Examples of Tier 1 Strategies:

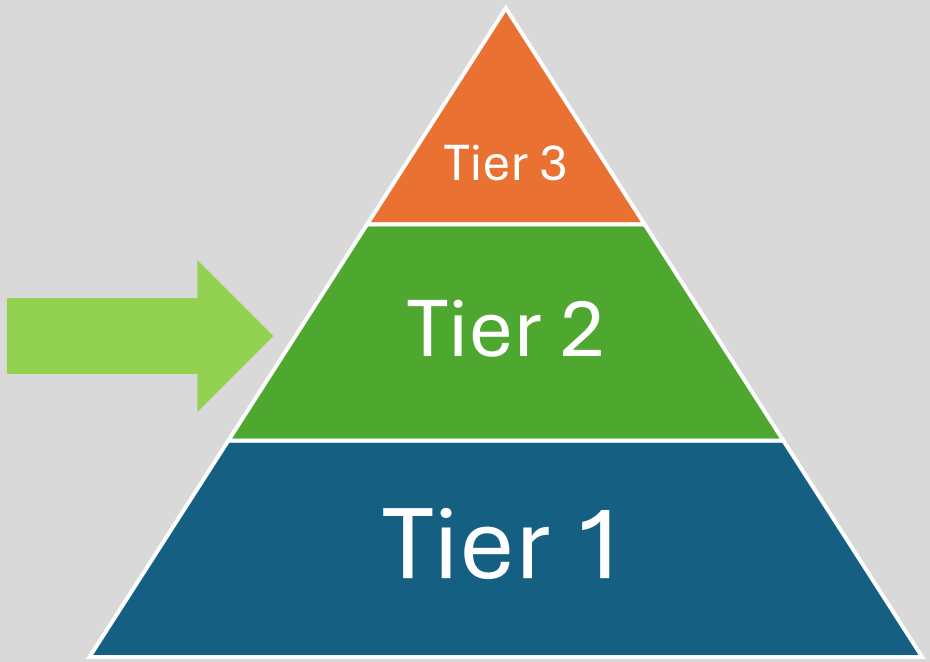
- Classroom-based digital wellness education (all grades, multiple subjects)
- School climate efforts that are inclusive of online and offline environments
- School policies related to smartphones and digital media use
- Responsible AI protocols
- Screening for mental health issues and problematic digital media use
- Staff professional development
- Parent engagement
- School-community collaboration to provide offline opportunities and reinforce efforts

# Example of Tier 1 Approach to AI



# Tier 2
# Targeted Supports

Small group supports for students needing additional guidance

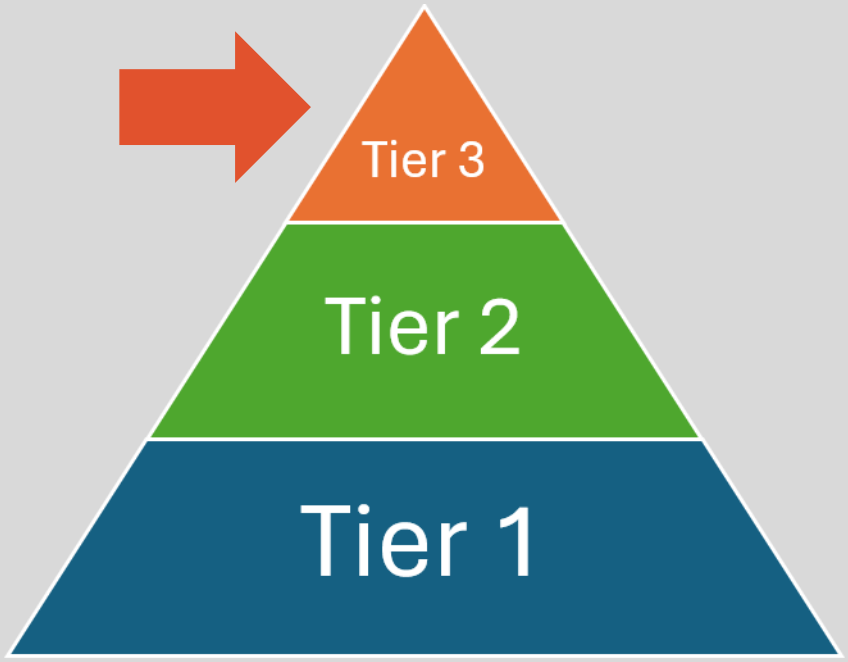



## Examples of Tier 2 strategies:

- Integrating digital wellness into existing group behavioral interventions (e.g., executive functioning, Lunch Bunch for social skills)
- Existing affinity groups (e.g., for girls, for LGBTQ+ students) that can integrate digital wellness skills
- Peer education/mentoring related to digital wellness

# Tier 3
# Intensive Supports

Individualized interventions for students experiencing significant challenges relate to or exacerbated by digital media use



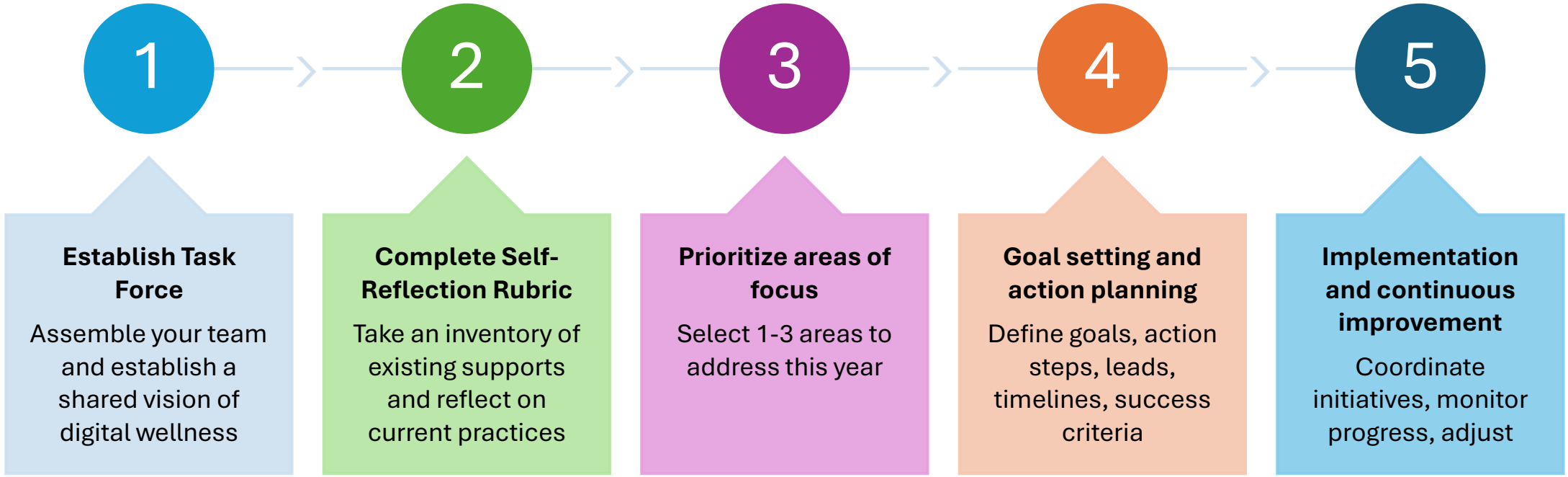

## Examples of Tier 3 Strategies:

- One-on-one counseling supports for:
  - Students with problematic or addictive media use
  - Students with significant mental health or behavioral challenges exacerbated by digital media use
  - Students who have experienced trauma related to cyberbullying
- Referrals to community resources for intensive supports



# The MTSS for Digital Wellness Process

# What does MTSS for Digital Wellness look like?



1

# Establish Team and Shared Vision

- **Define shared expectations and goals** for digital wellness
- **Create a structure** for effective team functioning
- **Build opportunities** for ongoing student and family input
- **Share information** with the school community and ensure strategies reflect diverse input and varying family practices



*Teams should include school/district leaders, educators, counselors, IT coordinators, nurses, parents/caregivers, community partners,* ***and students.***

2

# Complete Needs Assessment/Self-Reflection Rubric

- **Gather necessary data** needed regarding existing practices and student experiences
- **Connect digital experiences** to school functioning (e.g., attendance, engagement, behavior, school climate, relationships)
- **Gather** student, family, and staff perspectives
- **Conduct an inventory of current practices** and rate them based on evidence and current reality

*The process should be collaborative, honest, equity-centered, and repeated annually.*

# Needs Assessment Components



**Team Structures**
Membership, routines, and authority to coordinate digital wellness work within and across tiers

- Is there a shared vision for digital wellness?
- Are there avenues for defining priorities, providing input, and reviewing implementation?
- Do teams represent varying perspectives, including school staff, families, and students?



**Tiered Supports**
Availability of universal, targeted, and intensive supports matched to student needs

- What pedagogical approaches are in place? Are they coordinated across grades and subjects?
- What strategies are in place beyond the classroom?
- What small-group supports are available for those needing extra guidance and skill-building?
- What is available for students experiencing digital-related distress or problematic use?

# Needs Assessment Components



**Identification, Matching, and Monitoring**

*Connecting students to appropriate supports*

- Can staff recognize warning signs?
- Are there efforts to assess the role of digital media in the context of other issues?
- Are students, families, and staff able to raise concerns through clear and safe pathways?



**Drivers of Effectiveness**

*Leadership, staff capacity, and implementation practices to sustain the work*

- Do staff receive ongoing professional learning to respond to emerging issues and new technology?
- Are technology policies, digital wellness curriculum, SEL, health education, and student-support pathways aligned?
- Are student and family representatives supported to participate meaningfully?

# Needs Assessment Components



**Data Utilization**

*Fidelity and outcome data used to inform decisions, equity checks, and improvement*

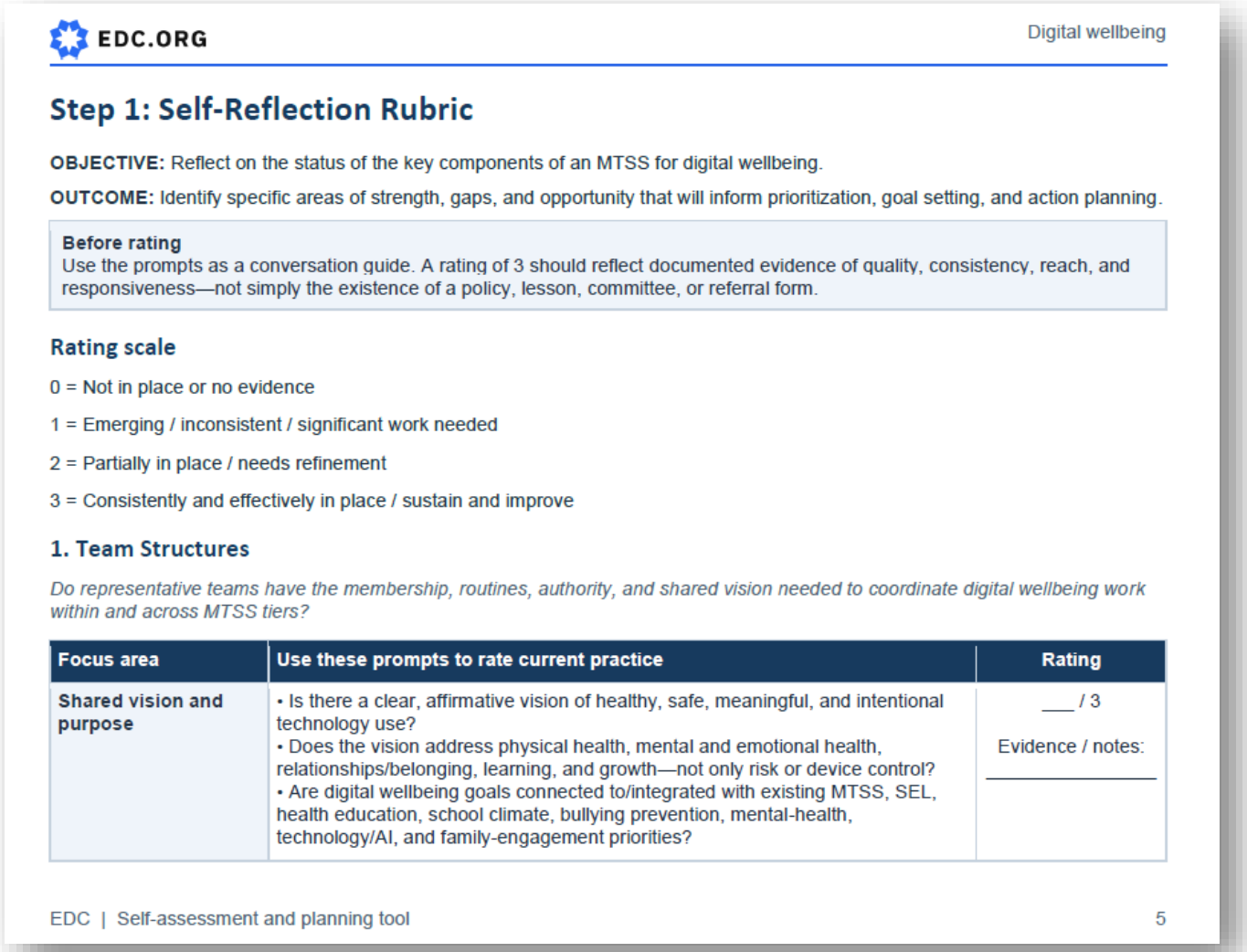
- Do data capture the range of students' digital experiences and related consequences?
- Are data disaggregated to identify disparities and inform supports across tiers?
- Does the school monitor implementation fidelity?
- How are student outcomes measured?
- How do teams communicate about data?

Types of Data:

- **Student experience and school-level data:** surveys, health indicators, school climate measures, referrals, bullying reports, and technology policy incidents
- **Fidelity data to show how well strategies are being delivered:** implementation checklists, participation records, observations, staff feedback, and reflection forms
- **Outcome data:** to monitor progress, make adjustments, and strengthen implementation over time.

Brief Activity

# Needs Assessment



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Digital wellbeing

## Step 1: Self-Reflection Rubric

**OBJECTIVE:** Reflect on the status of the key components of an MTSS for digital wellbeing.

**OUTCOME:** Identify specific areas of strength, gaps, and opportunity that will inform prioritization, goal setting, and action planning.

**Before rating**
Use the prompts as a conversation guide. A rating of 3 should reflect documented evidence of quality, consistency, reach, and responsiveness—not simply the existence of a policy, lesson, committee, or referral form.

### Rating scale

0 = Not in place or no evidence

1 = Emerging / inconsistent / significant work needed

2 = Partially in place / needs refinement

3 = Consistently and effectively in place / sustain and improve

### 1. Team Structures

*Do representative teams have the membership, routines, authority, and shared vision needed to coordinate digital wellbeing work within and across MTSS tiers?*

| Focus area | Use these prompts to rate current practice | Rating |
|---|---|---|
| **Shared vision and purpose** | • Is there a clear, affirmative vision of healthy, safe, meaningful, and intentional technology use?<br>• Does the vision address physical health, mental and emotional health, relationships/belonging, learning, and growth—not only risk or device control?<br>• Are digital wellbeing goals connected to/integrated with existing MTSS, SEL, health education, school climate, bullying prevention, mental-health, technology/AI, and family-engagement priorities? | ___ / 3<br>Evidence / notes: |

EDC | Self-assessment and planning tool 5

3

# Prioritize Areas of Focus Within and Across Tiers

- **Review** student digital wellness data, rubric ratings, existing practices and gaps, and team reflections
- **Consider** feasibility, readiness, potential impact, and match to the school and community needs
- **Apply** an effort-versus-impact discussion
- **Select the MTSS elements** where the team is best positioned to make progress this year.



4

# Goal Setting and Action Planning

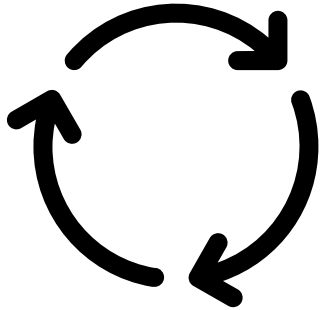
- **Draft 1–3 goals** for each digital wellness focus area
- **Define what success will look** like for students, staff, families, and the school/district (e.g., healthier technology habits, stronger policies, enhanced school-family partnerships)
- **Identify fidelity data and outcome measures** to monitor progress and assess reach of digital wellness supports
- **Determine roles and responsibilities** for implementing action steps



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# Implementation and Continuous Improvement

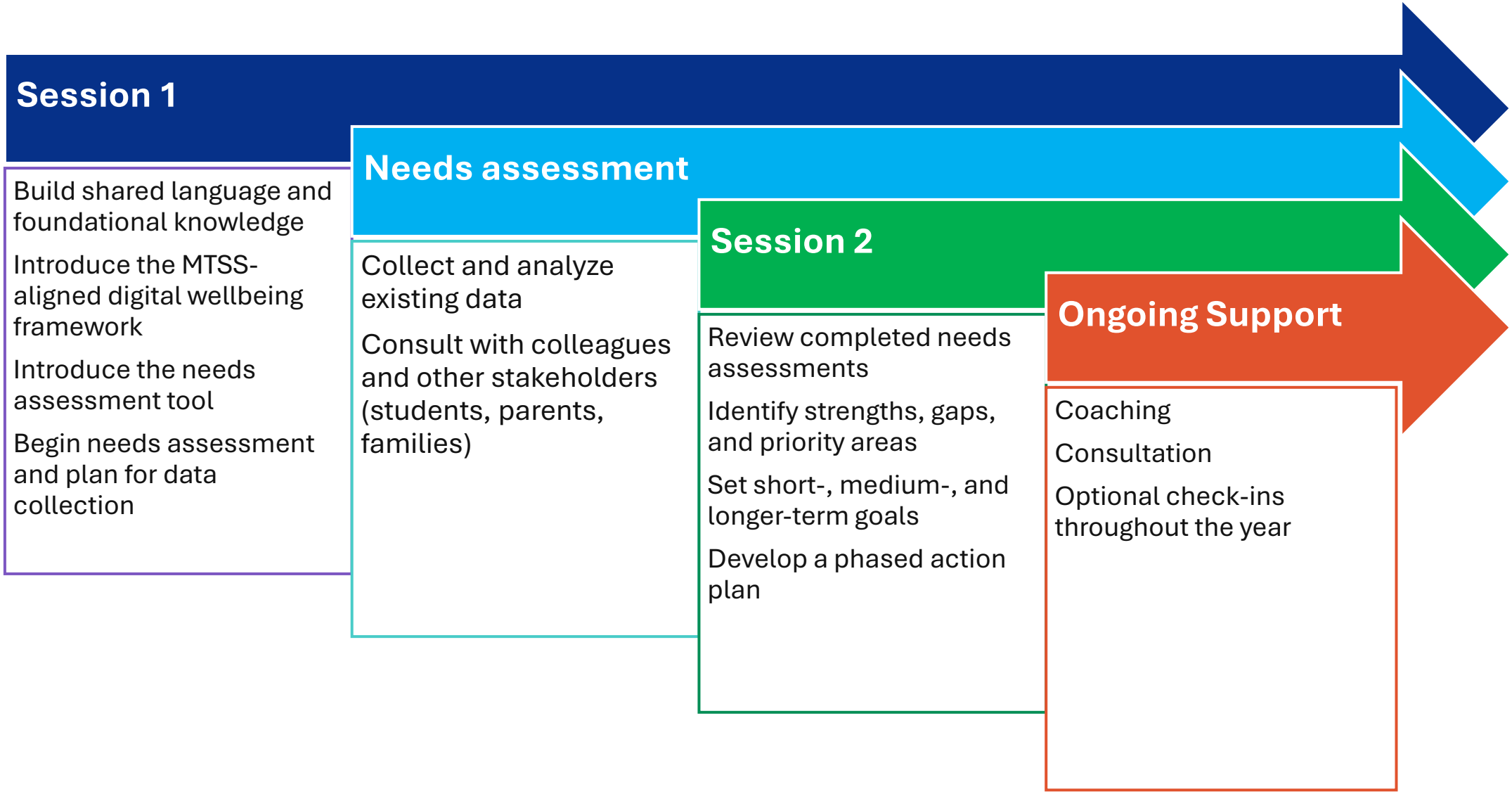
- **Share insights and plans** with all stakeholders.
- **Implement, monitor, and use data** to make mid-course corrections.
- **Revisit equity**: Are supports reaching students consistently across groups and settings?
- **Repeat the process annually** as part of continuous improvement
- **Develop** a shared, evidence-informed, equity-driven plan for healthier digital lives for all students.





# Three Case Studies

# Using a Peer Learning Model with Supports



# District A: Forming a Cohesive Strategy

## Identified needs

- Lacking comprehensive K-12 approach; current efforts focused on gr. 5-8 and lacking strong DW component
- Fragmented ownership across health, advisory, technology education
- Concern about introducing another initiative given staff overload
- Need for better parent communication about current policies and efforts

## Priorities

- Build on existing efforts to strengthen tier 1 infrastructure for SEL supports to incorporate digital wellness
- Develop more cohesive curriculum
- Establish district-wide task force with multiple stakeholders

## Actions

- Piloting digital wellbeing curriculum in middle school technology classes district-wide
- Included specific goal related to DW and tech in new five-year strategic plan
- Established district-wide task force with school/district staff, parents, and students

# District B: Strengthening Tier 1 Supports

## Identified needs

- Lack of comprehensive K-12 curriculum
- Need to strengthen other Tier 1 supports; lack of Tier 2 and 3 supports
- Strong parent support but difficulty reaching families who may need the most support

## Priorities

- Establish a Tier 1 K-12 curriculum to define what should take place across different subjects (e.g., in health, in tech, in SEL education)
- Review other Tier 1 strategies, including smartphone policies

## Actions

- Brought teachers together over the summer to develop curriculum, focusing on grades 4-12
- Added 3 lessons per year on AI from librarians
- Implemented bell-to-bell policies across all grade levels (with pouches)
- Planning to create companion parent education materials to match curriculum

# District C: Focusing on Parent Engagement

## Identified needs

- Lack of comprehensive K-12 DW plan; inconsistencies across schools at same grade level
- Tier 1 instruction focuses on digital literacy taught by IT and library specialists; does not include "the emotional wellbeing piece"
- Current tier 2 and 3 supports do not incorporate DW
- Low parent engagement in digital media events

## Priorities

- Develop a more cohesive K-12 DW curriculum
- Increase parental awareness and parent engagement in digital wellness efforts

## Actions

- K-12 parent survey:
  - Awareness of school policies; devices use and restrictions at home; Information desired and preferred communications
- Developed DW website with parent resources
- Monthly ParentSquare emails on DW topics aligned with survey
- Plans to incorporate brief videos

# MTSS Pilot Key Takeaways

- Districts acknowledged that existing efforts were fragmented and often focused on safety and digital media literacy, with less on digital wellness.
- Teams identified gaps across all levels and prioritized Tier 1 supports, with future plans to enhance Tier 2 (especially) and Tier 3 supports.
- A challenge includes the lack of a universal screening tool specific to problematic digital media use that can be used in school settings and a protocol for responding.
- The MTSS pilot helped teams come together and elevate the issue of digital wellness and take coordinated action.



# Getting Started

Establish a **Digital Wellness Task Force** (or charge an existing group) to determine priorities and strategies, educate the school community, gain buy-in, and represent all voices (school staff, students, parents/caregivers)

Conduct an **inventory and assessment** of existing digital wellness efforts; prioritize efforts to fill gaps and improve current practices

Begin to think about how you might determine students' **levels of need** and ways you may match them with the appropriate **supports**

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# Thank you!

For more information, check out **edc.org** and https://go.edc.org/MASC2026

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