Nash County Schools, North Carolina

Nash County Schools is located in Nashville, NC, in the northeastern area of the state. The district is classified as being on the rural-urban fringe and has 23 schools (11 elementary, 4 middle (6-8), 2 middle-high (6-12), and 6 high schools). In 2025-26 the district had a student population of 13,178, with 38.4% of families receiving federal SNAP benefits.

Sources: NCES data from CCD 2025-26 and EDGE 2025-26; NCES School District Demographic Dashboard.

Interview Date: August 2026

Background and Catalyst

Nash County Schools began implementing a districtwide Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) approximately nine years ago. The primary driving force was a need for a comprehensive framework for school improvement to guide the work teachers and principals were doing at the school level. The district sought a framework that would address not only academic achievement, but also student behavior and social-emotional learning (SEL), recognizing that all three influence student success.

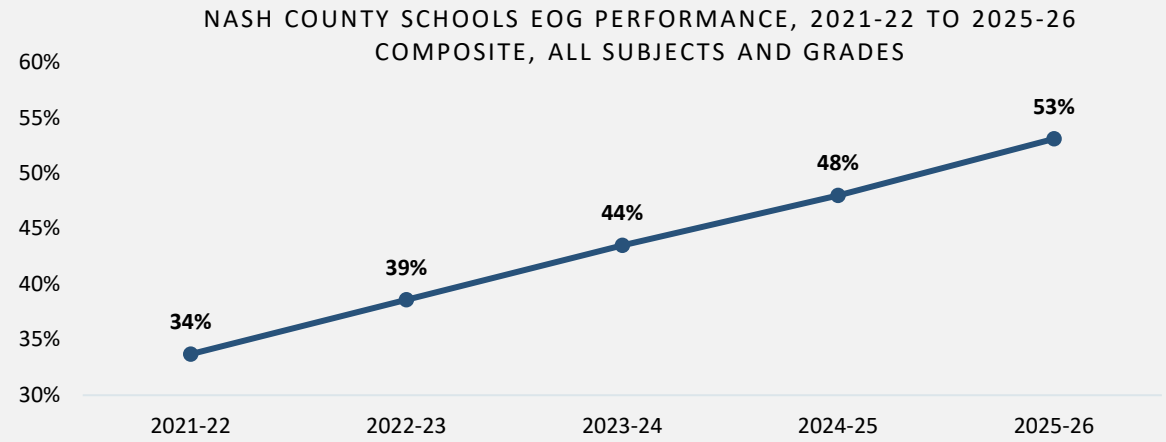
From its inception, Nash County viewed MTSS as more than an intervention system. District leaders describe it as a framework for total school improvement, focused on understanding how academics, behavior, and SEL work together to support the whole child. The district has intentionally reinforced the message that these components cannot be addressed in isolation and that successful schools require attention to all three areas.

Early implementation efforts focused heavily on helping educators understand the framework and creating a common vision across schools. District staff conducted belief surveys to better understand how teachers viewed student learning, held extensive meetings with school leadership teams, and consistently communicated common language and expectations. Leaders described the implementation process as one of continual refinement, "building the plane as we went" and making adjustments based on school feedback and student data. District staff noted that it took several years for the framework to become deeply embedded within schools. By approximately the fourth year, they began to see significant shifts in understanding and implementation as MTSS became more integrated into district culture.

The results of Nash County Schools' work have become apparent over the past several years, according to the district—not only in academic data, but also in terms of reduced student suspensions. District leaders report being "very strategic" in ensuring that teachers receive training in classroom management and maximizing positive interactions with students to help reduce problematic behaviors, because "kids have to be present to get good instruction in order to be successful."

The chart that follows shows that Nash County Schools has made significant, steady progress toward improving student achievement since at least 2021-22.

Figure 1. Nash County Schools Composite EOG Performance from 2021-22SY to 2025-2026SY.



Source: NCDPI Test Proficiency Dashboard

The Present: What Does MTSS Look Like Now?

Leadership: Vision, Teams, Structures, and Processes

Today, Nash County Public Schools operates MTSS through a collaborative leadership structure that spans academics, behavior, and social-emotional learning. The district's Student Support Services, Academics and Accountability, Mental Health, and MTSS personnel work together to ensure that implementation remains coordinated and aligned.

A unique feature of Nash County's implementation is the districtwide BEAM (Behavior, Evaluation, Assessment, and Monitoring) Team, established in 2018. The team includes district leaders, principals, school counselors, nurses, at-risk youth coordinators, and other stakeholders representing elementary, middle, and high school perspectives. Through monthly meetings, team members monitor behavior, mental health, and intervention needs while coordinating efforts with district academic leaders.

In addition to district structures, every school identifies an MTSS/PBIS contact person responsible for helping coordinate implementation and communication at the building level. While budget constraints have reduced the number of dedicated MTSS facilitator positions in schools, district leaders have prioritized building expertise among school personnel so that knowledge and leadership are distributed rather than resting with one individual.

Building Consistency Through Data-Based Problem-Solving

One of the district's most significant recent initiatives has been an effort to establish a consistent approach to data-based problem solving. Fidelity measures and annual reviews repeatedly identified data-based problem solving as an area for growth, leading the district to devote professional learning and coaching resources to strengthening this aspect of implementation. District leaders found that schools were using several different models to analyze data and identify solutions, creating confusion and inconsistent language across the district. In response, Nash County adopted the four-step problem-solving process used by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and has spent the past several years building consistency around its use. Leaders describe this work as a major step toward creating common language and shared expectations across schools.

Assessing and Supporting Implementation

Nash County Schools relies on both the Fidelity Assessment for MTSS (FAM-S) and the District Fidelity Assessment for MTSS (FAM-D) to monitor implementation and guide improvement efforts. School leadership teams annually review FAM-S data, identify priorities, and embed related goals into their school improvement planning processes. District leaders use FAM-D data to determine districtwide priorities and supports.

The district also conducts regular school support and monitoring activities throughout the year. District MTSS staff meet with schools to review progress, identify challenges, and provide tailored support before annual fidelity reviews occur. Leaders emphasized that schools are not expected to implement MTSS in exactly the same way; rather, district staff work with schools to identify their unique needs and provide individualized supports based on context, demographics, and performance data.

Connecting MTSS and School Improvement

A defining feature of Nash County's implementation is the extent to which MTSS has become integrated into other district initiatives. District leaders described MTSS as being embedded in the district strategic plan, school improvement planning, mental health initiatives, student services goals, and behavior supports. Rather than existing as a separate initiative, MTSS serves as the framework through which district work is organized and coordinated.

> "[MTSS] is about continuous improvement and about continuously building our schools in the areas of academics, behavior and SEL. It's not going anywhere in order for us to move forward as a district."

Leaders emphasize that the district intentionally avoids creating separate MTSS goals when the work can be integrated into broader school improvement efforts. This approach reinforces their message that MTSS is not an additional program, but instead the process through which schools improve student outcomes. This has helped reinforce the message that MTSS "is not going away."

Supporting the Whole Child

District leaders identified the integration of academics, behavior, and social-emotional learning as one of Nash County's defining characteristics. To support behavior and SEL, the district has implemented a number of initiatives over the past decade, including districtwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), the CHAMPS classroom management framework, and evidence-based social-emotional learning curricula. All schools maintain intervention matrices for academics and behavior, which help educators determine how interventions should intensify as student needs increase. Although SEL does not exist as a separate matrix, district leaders intentionally integrate SEL supports into behavior systems because of the close relationship between the two areas.

District staff have also worked to ensure that every school includes a designated intervention period during the school day. While the name of the period varies across schools, these intervention blocks provide opportunities for students who need additional support beyond core instruction to receive targeted interventions.

Strengthening Tier 1 Instruction

Over time, Nash County Schools has increasingly emphasized the importance of Tier 1 instruction. District leaders explained that when they see a school with a large number of students who need intervention, they work with school Student Support Teams to examine core academic, behavior, and SEL programs and practices and identify areas that may need strengthening. Interviewees noted that strengthening core instruction remains a districtwide priority and that expectations for improving Tier 1 systems are consistently reinforced through district communication and professional learning.

Impacts of MTSS on the District

District leaders attribute part of the district's recent academic growth to the sustained implementation of MTSS. They pointed to improvements in academic proficiency, student achievement, and school performance over the last several years as evidence that the district's comprehensive approach is producing positive results.

Leaders also noted stronger alignment and communication across district initiatives, increased consistency in school improvement practices, and improved leadership capacity at both district and school levels. Much of this growth has been driven by clear messaging from district leadership and a shared understanding that MTSS is central to the district's continuous improvement efforts.

Additionally, Nash County has expanded systems for family engagement and communication over the course of its MTSS journey. The district now has a dedicated Director of Parent and Family Engagement, hosts family-focused events, and uses multiple communication channels to strengthen partnerships with families and increase understanding of supports available to students.

Challenges

Strengthening Social-Emotional Learning at the Secondary Level

While district leaders identify many successes, they also acknowledge ongoing challenges. One area for continued growth is the implementation of social-emotional learning in high schools. Interviewees reported that North Carolina's Parents Bill of Rights law, passed in 2023, has made it more difficult to make data-informed decisions for social-emotional learning and supports. The district has not been able to use a universal SEL screener since the passage of the law, which makes it more difficult to collect data on how students are doing.

> "[O]ftentimes high schools don't look at SEL as important because they're very content driven… [but] social emotional learning goes with it, because all of that impacts their relationships, their interpersonal skills, their ability to collaborate."

Interviewees also noted that secondary educators often view themselves primarily as content specialists and may not immediately see SEL as part of their role. The district has worked to help high school staff understand how SEL supports collaboration, relationships, engagement, and student success across all content areas. To strengthen implementation, the district recently transitioned from the Second Step curriculum to Character Strong, which leaders believe is more user-friendly and easier to integrate into daily instruction. District staff are optimistic that the new resources will help deepen SEL implementation at both middle and high school levels.

Maintaining Consistency Across Schools

As leadership changes occur and new staff enter the district, maintaining a common understanding of MTSS remains an ongoing priority. District leaders continue to emphasize training, communication, and distributed leadership to ensure that implementation remains strong regardless of personnel changes. Initiatives like the move to a common problem-solving model help maintain a level of consistency in implementation across schools.

Advice for Other Districts

Be Patient and Build a Strong Foundation

When reflecting on their experience implementing MTSS, district leaders emphasized the importance of patience. They cautioned other districts not to expect immediate results and described MTSS implementation as a process that unfolds over several years. Building understanding, changing mindsets, and establishing systems takes time. Districts should focus on creating a strong foundation and recognize that sustainable implementation develops through continuous improvement, rather than quick fixes.

As one interviewee explained, implementing MTSS is like building a house: first the foundation must be laid, then the framework constructed, and only afterward can the work continue to grow and improve.

> "It's almost like building a house, in that it just takes time. [When] we first started implementing [MTSS], we just wanted everything to change right away, but it doesn't."

Secure the Commitment of Leaders

Nash County Schools also stressed the importance of leadership support at every level. Interviewees credit strong support from district leadership, including senior administrators and department leaders, with helping MTSS become embedded into the culture of the district. Leaders emphasized that meaningful and sustained implementation requires clear priorities, consistent messaging, and ongoing commitment at both the district and school levels.

Conclusion

After nearly a decade of implementation, Nash County Schools views MTSS as a permanent part of its district culture and a key framework for continuous improvement. Through intentional leadership, integrated systems, a focus on the whole child, and a commitment to ongoing refinements of practice, the district has built a sustainable framework that supports academic achievement, behavior, and social-emotional development. While challenges remain, particularly in strengthening SEL implementation at the secondary level, district leaders remain focused on refining their systems and ensuring that every student receives the supports needed to succeed.

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