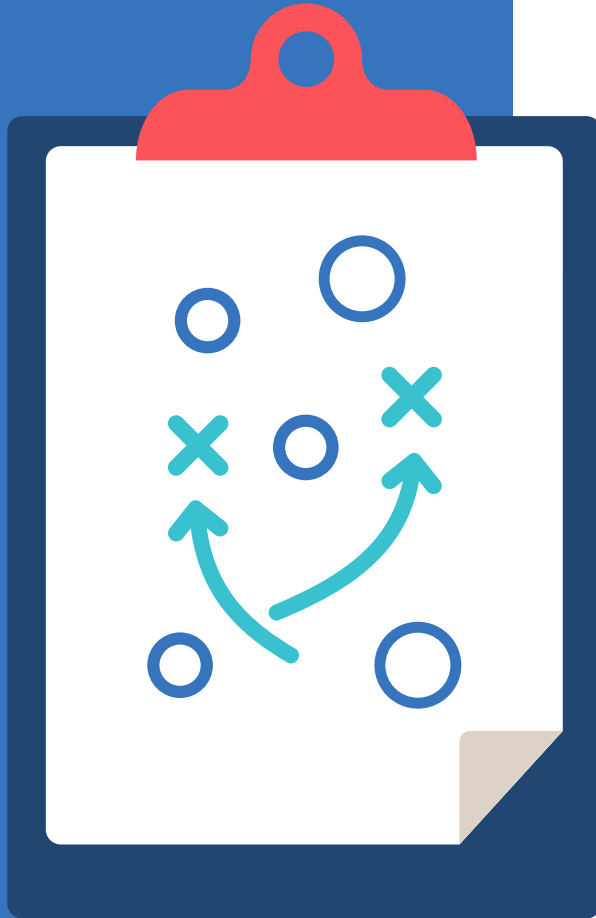




BRANCHING MINDS
MTSS Playbook Series



Beginning-of-Year Gameplan

for School and District Leaders

eBook

Introduction

When I took my first principal position, I discovered that my new school would begin the year just two points away from failing, according to the state accountability measures. Fortunately, I had a playbook to turn things around! From my experience as an instructional coach and assistant principal, I knew that using the MTSS framework had increased student achievement at my other schools. So, I got right to work that summer laying out an MTSS gameplan to support our students.

This BOY gameplan will walk you through the steps I took:

- That **summer**, to plan MTSS structures
- During the **first month of school**, as we prepared to start the systematic delivery of student support
- And, in the **second and third months of school**, as we monitored our first intervention cycles, analyzed the results, and made adjustments.

Each section of this eBook will teach you how to engage your staff in the heart of the work – the MTSS Workflow. The Workflow may be slow to start if your staff have less experience with MTSS , but once you get to the third month of school, this problem-solving cycle will gain momentum and work continuously.

I am hooked on MTSS because my experience at three schools in two districts proved that an effective MTSS framework significantly improved student outcomes. When you see students succeed and the look on their faces because they are proud of their academic, behavior, and social skills growth, you will be hooked on MTSS, too!



Dr. Valerie Parsons
MTSS Implementation Specialist
Branching Minds Consultant

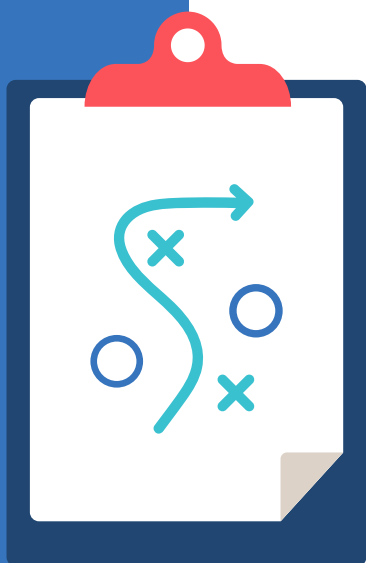


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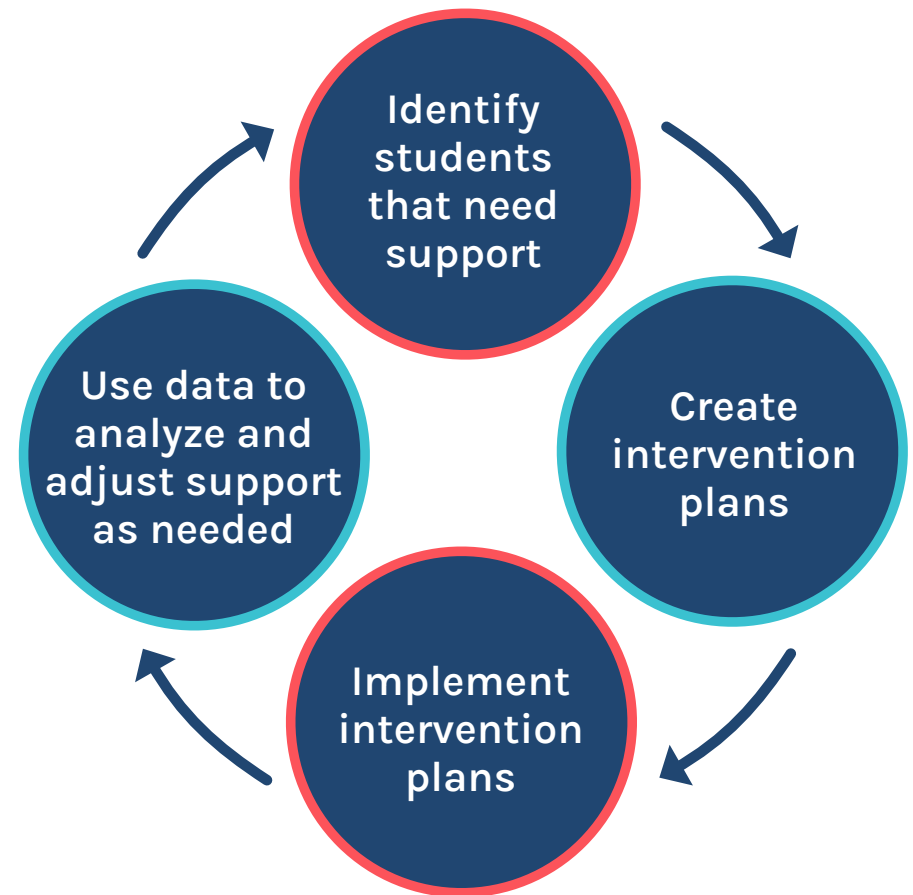
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The MTSS Workflow

The MTSS Workflow continuously cycles through four steps that help schools problem-solve and address the needs of students who are struggling:

- 1 Teachers begin by leveraging data to identify students who need support.
- 2 They then create intervention support plans for individuals or groups of students.
- 3 The third step is implementing the plan, which usually takes about six weeks.
- 4 When the intervention is completed, a group of educators meets to analyze the data and adjust the intervention support as needed. At the fourth step, the cycle may end for the student because they have met their goal, or we may adjust the student's intervention plan, based on the progress monitoring data, to better meet their needs.

The MTSS Workflow is the engine that drives MTSS success – you'll see it at work in every section of this eBook!



The MTSS Workflow

The BOY Gameplan

Here is a quick overview of what you can expect in each part of the BOY Gameplan and how it connects to the MTSS Workflow:



GET READY -
Summer planning

Having a clear vision and well-developed structures and systems to share with teachers before school starts will curb teachers' fears about a new initiative or help gain buy-in for consistent (and ever-improving) implementation. The summer is also a great time for your MTSS Team to accomplish **Step 1 of the MTSS Workflow: *Identifying students that need support.***



GET SET -
1st month of school

Let's face it: MTSS does not happen during the first three weeks of school. This is the time teachers take to get to know their students and build the relationships. Even though formal MTSS is not happening in the classrooms, these 3 to 4 weeks are crucial for **Step 2 of the MTSS Workflow: *Creating individual or group intervention plans*** is complete.



GO -
2nd and 3rd
months of school

We're off and running! **Step 3 of the MTSS Workflow: *Implement intervention plans*** begins, and school leaders are busy working out all the rough spots in the systems. As we round the corner in month 3, it's time for **Step 4 of the MTSS Workflow: *Use data to analyze and adjust support as needed.***

PART 1: GET READY by planning the STRUCTURES

My first step to getting ready for the school year with MTSS was to establish the structures that would allow me to create efficient [systems](#) in my MTSS framework. Let's first define what we mean by structures. **In an MTSS framework, a structure is how we configure the components that make a system function effectively in a school.**

Summer is also a time for you to lead your MTSS Team through the actions needed to accomplish **Step 1 of the MTSS Workflow: Identifying students who need support**. Before you get too far into planning, you will need to decide what approach you will take as you delve into the data. There are two schools of thought about which data to use to establish the first intervention groups of the school year. I have experience with both approaches, but let me explain them before telling you which one I prefer and why.

OPTION 1

Using Beginning-of-Year (BOY) Screening data in the first month of school

After the first three to four weeks of school, conduct the first round of screening of all students using a universal screening assessment. It should take about a week to allow each teacher time in their schedule to screen all students. This might take more than a week for students who need additional diagnostic testing. During week 5 or 6 of the school year, grade-level meetings convene to analyze the data, create group plans, and plan for the first intervention groups of the school year to begin. With all that goes on during the first month of school, you would be a very efficient school if you could get your support groups started by the 6th or 7th week of school. Realistically, they will probably begin closer to the end of 9 weeks.

OPTION 2

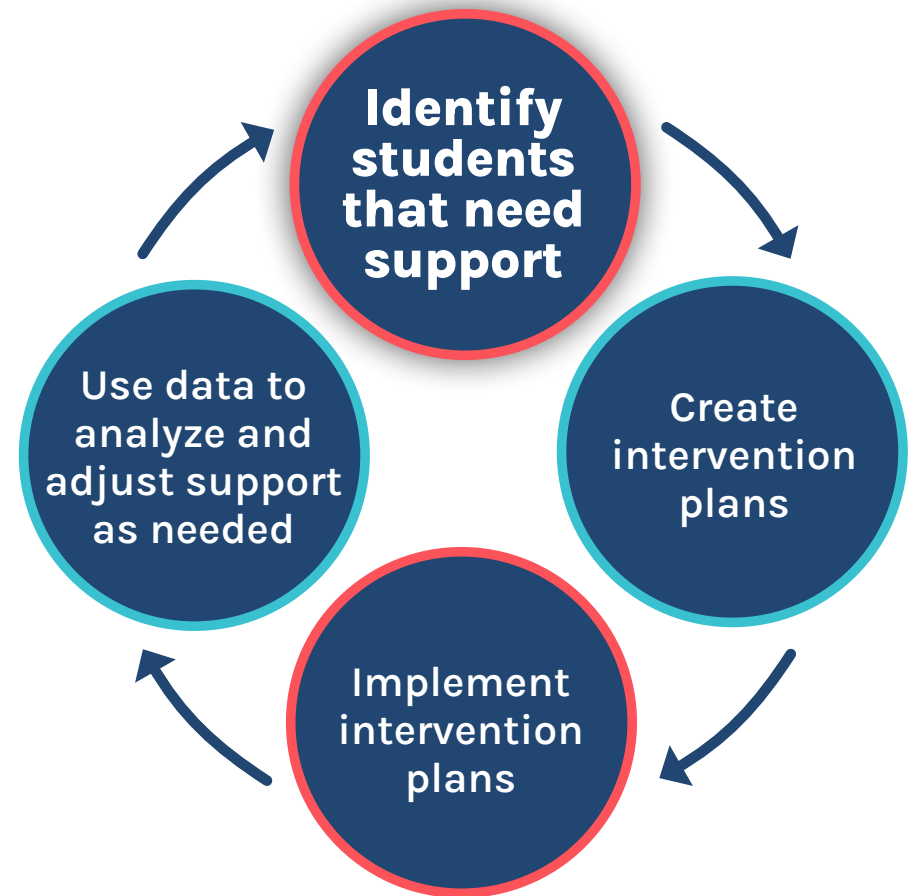
Using End-of-Year (EOY) data to screen over the summer

During the summer (or as we got better at this, we did this at the end of the school year), use EOY universal screening data and any additional diagnostic data to determine the first intervention groups for the beginning of the new school year. Since the groupings are completed at the EOY, you can put the start date of your BOY intervention groups to begin in week 3. Each teacher will have students new to the school to screen and possibly add to groups, but this is minimal compared to screening the whole school.

Why I chose Option 2: Using End-of-Year (EOY) data to screen over the summer

I know what you're thinking - "What about the dreaded Summer Slide?" Yes, it is a real thing! However, if you wait for all the pieces of Option 1 to unfold, you could be starting intervention groups close to the 9-week mark, which means you have lost almost 6 weeks of time, or in other words, possibly a whole intervention cycle.

After many years of MTSS implementation, my MTSS team chose to mitigate the loss of intervention time at the beginning of the school year by using EOY data to group BOY intervention groups. This approach has a bonus because it is a lot less stressful when teachers start the year already knowing their intervention groups and the exact date we will begin intervention support time. Both options will still produce results, so choose which is best for you. However, for this guide, we will use Option 2.



The MTSS Workflow



Podcast: [How to Build Your MTSS Structure with Christine Downing](#)



SUMMER: Structures

Guiding Questions

Resources

Choose your MTSS team

- Who are your standing members?
- Who are your rotating members?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of each MTSS team member?
- Do your team members represent the diversity of your staff and stakeholders?



[Blog](#): Successful MTSS Teams



[Webinar](#): How to create an MTSS Team to guide your MTSS practice

As a team, analyze school/district MTSS health

- What areas and data sources are needed: math, ELA, SEL, attendance, course performance, etc.
- What does the data say about the equity of your student support and the fidelity of your interventions?
- Which grade levels show percentile growth or positive tier movement?
- What percent of the student population is sufficiently supported by Core Instruction?



[Worksheet](#): School Health Data Collection and Action Planning



[Webinar](#): Evaluating the Quality and Effectiveness of Your MTSS Practice

Use the [Self-Assessment of MTSS Implementation \(SAMI\)](#) to determine next steps

- Where does your school excel?
- What areas could you enhance?
- Which areas did you identify for your MTSS Team to set strategic goals?
- How can your MTSS Team utilize the assessment findings and SWOT analysis to develop a vision, mission, and action plan for the school, prioritizing areas for improvement?



[Podcast](#): MTSS Requires Shifting Mindsets



[Blog](#): Getting Real: Considerations and Self-Assessment for Implementing MTSS

SUMMER: Structures

Guiding Questions

Resources

Create the vision and goals for your MTSS Framework

- Will your MTSS Team want to focus on academics, behavior, attendance, SEL, or a combination?
- What is your MTSS Team's Vision?
- What are the goals/expectations/procedures for MTSS Implementation this school year?
- Who will be affected the most by these new changes, and how will you provide them with additional support?
- Which intervention or technology tools should you focus your Professional Development efforts on?



[Webinar](#): How to create a Vision of MTSS with ALL Stakeholders to Improve your MTSS Implementation



[Blog](#): Principal to Principal: 5 Steps to MTSS Success

Determine the cadence for the 3 types of MTSS meetings - Leadership, Grade/Content Team, and Individual Student Support

- How often will each meeting occur, and how long?
- Do you need coverage for teachers during any of the meetings?
- Do any of the meeting times require a change to the master schedule?
- Which type of meeting agenda do you want your team to use?
- How can we ensure meetings follow the MTSS Workflow in our Agenda?



[Guide](#): to MTSS School Meetings: includes agenda templates for each type of meeting.

SUMMER: Structures

Guiding Questions

Resources

Determine how your intervention blocks will be organized and revise the master schedule and school calendar if needed

- What are state or district requirements for instructional and intervention minutes?
- How long will each intervention block be for each grade level? Simultaneous or staggered?
- When will regular MTSS meetings occur?
- When will you administer assessments such as Universal Screeners?
- Which stakeholders should you include when making revisions to the master schedule to ensure all staff have a voice?



[Blog](#): Master Scheduling for MTSS, Options and Challenges Steps to MTSS Success



[Book Recommendation](#): Elementary School Scheduling: Enhancing Instruction for Student Achievement

Develop communication protocols for MTSS implementation

- How will staff provide feedback when they experience barriers to MTSS implementation?
- How will you communicate when changes are needed?
- Who are the best messengers for MTSS, and how will you keep them updated with changes?



[Blog](#): Communication Planning for MTSS

Plan Professional Learning (PL) for teacher in-service/orientation

- How will you articulate the vision, goals, and components of your MTSS framework?
- How will you structure time for grade levels to analyze last year's EOY data and determine health?
- What support will you provide teachers as they begin analyzing student data and creating individual and group intervention plans?



[Slides](#): Introducing Your MTSS Team

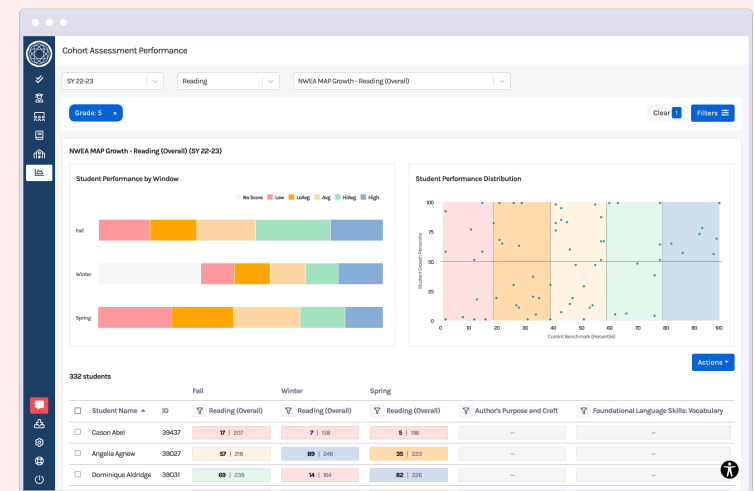


[Webinar](#): Using Screening Data to Tier Students for MTSS

Structure Tips for MTSS Leaders:

- **Look at all available data:** benchmark, universal screener, attendance, discipline, and parent and staff surveys. This will give you a more complete picture of your school's health.
- **Strong Tier 1, or Core Instruction, is the foundation of a healthy MTSS practice.** Analyzing the school's health and making improvements to core instruction will reduce the number of students who need intervention.
- Consider creating a **conceptual framework, picture, or diagram** representing your vision, and revise it as needed.
- Even if you decide to start the year with only a few grade levels in intervention, **plan time for all grades** so it is easier to make adjustments in the middle of the year.
- **Identify a member of your staff who is detailed and talented at scheduling,** then utilize their expertise!
- **Expect changes** in your MTSS implementation, whether it is your first year or tenth. A good communication plan will prevent staff frustration when revisions must be made.

Branching Minds helps you quickly and easily analyze data to determine students' needs with the Cohort Assessment Report. Your MTSS teams can create individual and group intervention plans directly from this report!



Cohort Assessment Performance Report

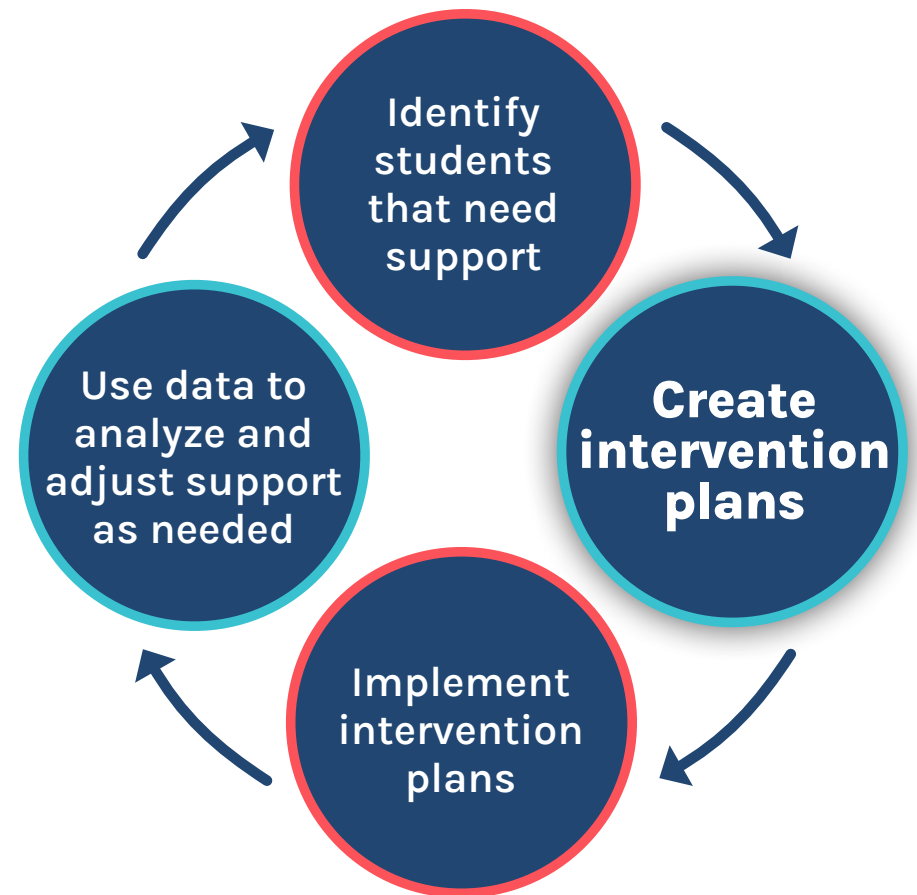
Congratulations! You made it through the hardest part- developing structures to ensure your systems will flow smoothly. After you have delivered the BOY Professional Learning to staff and they have successfully identified students who need support, you have completed **Step 1 of the MTSS Workflow: Identifying students who need support.** You are also well on your way to finishing **Step 2 of the MTSS Workflow: Creating Intervention Plans for your groups.** You are READY for school to start and to GET SET for the first round of intervention groups.



PART 2: GET SET with SYSTEMS

Now that school has started, teachers can focus on building relationships with students, creating a classroom community, and gathering qualitative data as they get to know their students' strengths and needs. And, a few teachers will still need to screen new students, add them to intervention groups, and tie up any other loose ends to complete **Step 2 of the MTSS Workflow: *Creating individual or group intervention plans.***

From the MTSS Team's perspective, the first few weeks of school get the staff and students ready for intervention/enrichment time. Of course, this starts with establishing **Tier 1 behavior expectations** throughout the school. This consistency helps students transition to other teachers' classrooms for intervention, as they will already know the expectations. In addition, the first month of school is when the MTSS Team's **communication protocols** become so important, as staff members may need to revise structures and respond to unexpected challenges. They will be excited to see their vision come to life!




The MTSS Workflow



1st MONTH OF SCHOOL: Systems

Timeline	Questions to Ask	Resources
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Implement school-wide behavioral expectations and classroom management plans

Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the district have any new initiatives related to behavior expectations? • Can all staff clearly communicate the school's vision and school-wide behavioral expectations? • Do you have a protocol and training/coaching support for classroom management? 	 Webinar : Using Proactive and Preventative Behavioral Strategies in MTSS
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Provide differentiated professional learning and support to help teachers complete intervention plans

Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What MTSS practice-driven challenges may need professional development? • Which types of differentiated support can you offer as a choice to teachers? • When will new students be screened to identify who will need a support plan and add them to a group, now and through the year? • Do teachers have questions about who is responsible for progress monitoring or what interventions should be utilized? 	 Guide : School Leaders Guide to Your Best MTSS Professional Learning  Blog : 4 Considerations to Support Educators in MTSS Professional Development
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The MTSS Team meets with each grade-level team

Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What roles and responsibilities will each grade-level team member have? • Are your teams ready to start intervention groups next week? • Do some grade levels need a refresher on the next steps after a few weeks into the intervention? (see Flowchart) 	 Flowchart : MTSS Intervention Process
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1st MONTH OF SCHOOL: Systems

Timeline	Questions to Ask	Resources
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Step 2 of the MTSS Workflow: Create intervention plans, has been completed for the first round of intervention groups

Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What groups will you have, and do the interventionists have a location to teach? • What format will you use to keep track of group locations? • Could you develop a system where teachers learn to “book” their own group locations? • How will you communicate the plan to all staff? 	 Webinar : Successful Intervention Planning in MTSS to improve student outcomes.
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The first week of intervention groups begins

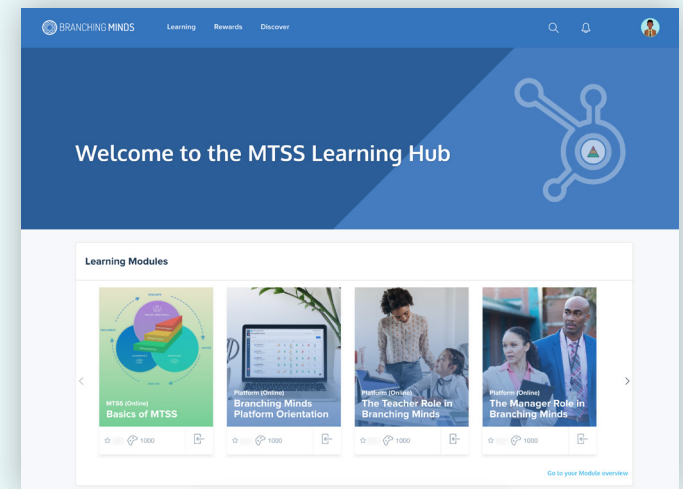
Week 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could members of your MTSS team rearrange their schedules so they are available for any issues that arise in the first week? • Do you have a strategic plan for your MTSS Team to conduct walk-throughs of each intervention group? • What communication plan do you have to ensure key players know of revisions that may need to be made as hiccups occur? • What monitoring tools could you use to gather data on fidelity implementation? 	 Form : MTSS Coaching Walk-Through Form
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Systems Tips for MTSS Leaders:

- Teachers' classroom management plans should be specific to their needs AND in alignment with school-wide expectations.
- Communication is key during this stage to prevent confusion and discouragement. One-on-one or small group coaching and micro-lessons could intercept any struggling teachers.
- Ensure support staff, such as ESL liaisons, special education teachers, interventionists, and counselors, are included in grade-level meetings as-needed
- **There is never a good time to start because everything is always busy! That's why it is best to pick a start date and stick to it. However, truth be told, I have had times when I needed to move the start date back a week. It happens.**
- Communicate to staff that MTSS is a journey. There will be bumps in the road, and we must work through them together. Use the "Something I Noticed..." Cards in the [Coaching Toolkit](#) to provide positive feedback.

Do you need help building capacity for MTSS implementation?

Branching Minds can help with [Asynchronous Professional Learning](#). The Branching Minds MTSS Learning Hub is an on-demand learning platform that includes learning modules, tutorials, and videos that support educators in MTSS best practices and the Branching Minds platform.



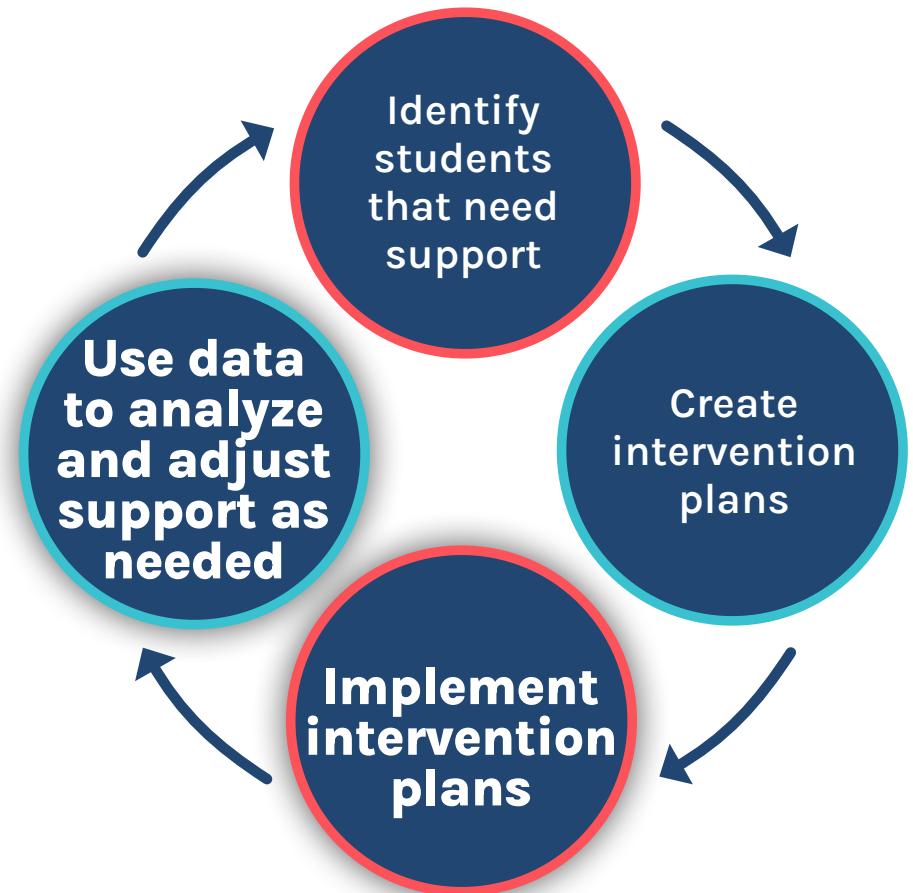
You're SET for Success and ready to move full steam ahead into the year. After the first week of intervention groups, you have worked out the hiccups, and weeks 2 through 6 of your intervention groups should flow seamlessly. Now, you can focus on the next steps: monitoring fidelity, administering universal screeners, ongoing professional development, grade-level self-assessment, and individual student support plan meetings.

PART 3: GO with IMPLEMENTATION DRIVERS

As you move into the school year, implementation drivers will strengthen your MTSS work:

- Competency development for your staff
- Organizational support as you check fidelity and progress monitor
- Leadership for change and continuous improvement.

The MTSS Team will monitor intervention fidelity during **Step 3 of the MTSS Workflow: Implementing intervention plans**. And, your first round of intervention groups will complete a full cycle of the **MTSS Workflow with Step 4: Use data to analyze and adjust support as needed**. You will have two forms of data- student progress monitoring from the intervention and BOY universal screener data- to help teams adjust each student's support plan.



The MTSS Workflow

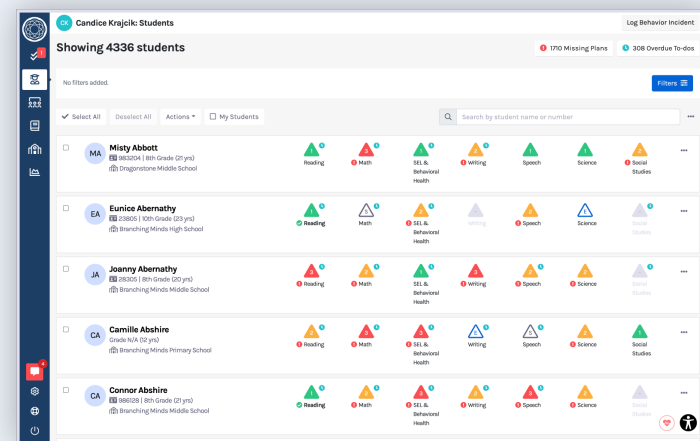
For the remainder of the school year, the MTSS Team and teachers will continue to follow the cycle of the MTSS Workflow for each student whose data shows they need support. The systematic practice of using universal screeners three times a year- BOY, MOY, and EOY is essential:

- It identifies students already in intervention but whose needs may have changed.
- It identifies students who were previously at Tier 1 but now need intervention to prevent them from “falling through the cracks.”






See Student Tier Levels and Plan status at a glance with the Branching Minds Student Overview

Branching Minds does the heavy lifting of screening and tiering students for support with [Tier Automation](#).



- Apply consistent cut points for assessments across academics and behavior.
- Use integrated social, emotional, and behavioral screeners.
- Update student tiers automatically when Branching Minds receives new assessment data within each screening window.



MTSS in the 2nd-3rd Months of School: Implementation Drivers

Timeline	Questions to Ask	Resources
Administer the Fall universal screener assessment		
Month 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will your school screen for academics, behavior, SEL, or all three? • Do the results of your universal screeners show patterns or trends that indicate curriculum or instruction that needs to be strengthened in Tier 1? 	 Blog : How MTSS Utilizes Universal Screeners to Tier Equitably.  Guide : Universal Social Emotional and Behavioral Screening: Using Data to Drive Decision-Making
Administer grade-level self-assessment		
Month 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which self-assessment tool will work best for your grade-level teams? • What other two dates during the school year will you choose to administer the MOY and EOY grade-level self-assessments? • Who on your MTSS Team will guide the grade level to create action items that will support the team's development? 	 Rubric : PLCO-used for grade-level team self-assessment  Quiz : MTSS Quiz Series
Plan for ongoing professional learning and coaching to build capacity		
Months 2 & 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can you gather feedback about what teachers need? • How can you be proactive about PL topics you know they will need month-to-month? 	 Toolkit : The MTSS Coaching Toolkit

MTSS in the 2nd-3rd Months of School: Implementation Drivers

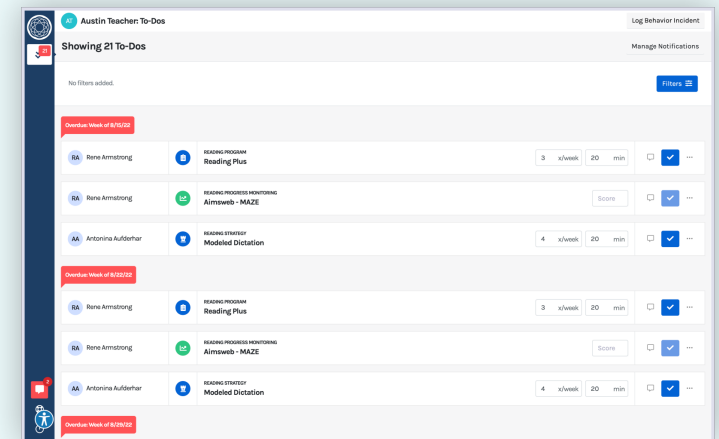
Timeline	Questions to Ask	Resources
Check for fidelity of interventions and student progress monitoring		
Months 2 & 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are interventions being implemented according to the support plan? • Is there a specific day each week that teachers/staff should have their intervention minutes and progress monitoring data logged? • Do teachers and staff have the support they need to implement interventions with fidelity? 	 Guide: Implementing MTSS at a Sustainable Pace
Conduct Individual Student Support Meetings		
Month 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you cover the classroom of the teacher whose student is being discussed? (if needed) • What procedures will you use to invite parents to these meetings? 	 Webinar: The MTSS 6-week Intervention Check-in

Implementation Tips for MTSS Leaders:

- ➔ Remember that intervention groups are based on each student's data from EOY last year. Once the Fall universal screener is administered, use the screening and progress monitoring data from the student's current intervention group to adjust support plans.
- ➔ Give diagnostic assessments to those students whose universal screening results indicate a need to dig deeper.
- ➔ Individual support team meetings will start about week 9 of the school year, 6 weeks after the intervention groups start.
- ➔ These first individual student support plan meetings may take longer than normal if everyone is new to the process. These meetings will become more efficient as the MTSS Team and teachers build capacity. Role-playing an individual student support plan meeting is a great way to model for teachers what they should expect.

The Branching Minds platform clarifies expectations for each staff member with a weekly intervention To-Do list and email notification system.

Teachers can log intervention minutes and progress monitoring data in seconds, making it easy to track fidelity of implementation and student progress.



Congratulations - you've made it through a complete MTSS Workflow cycle! Your MTSS Team, teachers, and staff have a lot to celebrate. Take the time to recognize their efforts along with the challenges you've faced so far. The great thing about MTSS is that it operates in cycles. If a cycle does not turn out how you had hoped, you have the process in place to improve and make it even better the next go around. The continuous improvement cycle of MTSS is not only great for students, it builds a group of teachers that, together, have strengthened their collective efficacy and believe they can accomplish what they set their minds to.



Advice for New Administrators

The hardest part is just getting started. There will always be an excuse not to start intervention groups because there is always legitimately “something going on” that makes it hard to get them going. Sometimes, the only thing you can do on the first day of intervention groups is have students practice transitioning to the appropriate group and meeting the intervention teacher. This is a great way to start groups so that teachers and staff have time to get to know the students in their groups and form relationships. Interventions do not have to start on the first day of intervention groups. Start what you can, but the key is to GO and get started!

If you are new to MTSS or just need a refresher on the MTSS terms, Branching Minds has several resources that can help you. First, watch this 5-minute [video: Essential MTSS Terms Explained: Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3 & More](#). This video gives you an overview of the most common terms when discussing MTSS. If you still come across terms that you want to clarify, check out the Branching Minds [Glossary of Key MTSS Terms](#).

Conclusion

You might be wondering what happened with my MTSS gameplan as a new principal at the school that was two points away from failing. Well, when the accountability report was released for that year, we had risen to a B rating overall, with an **A rating in closing the gaps!** We kept those systems in place, and even with all the pandemic challenges in the following years, our school maintained an A rating.

And this was not the only time I've seen great results from using the MTSS framework. As an instructional coach and assistant principal, I was part of teams that raised one school out of “Improvement Required” status in one year, and another school from 2 out of 5 stars to 5 out of 5 stars of distinction! You can see why I am completely hooked on MTSS. I have seen results time after time in different school settings when we prioritized MTSS and implemented instruction and interventions with fidelity. **MTSS really works.**

Wherever you are on your MTSS journey, the summer and start of the school year are critical for your success. It's the perfect time to set yourself and your staff up for your best year yet with MTSS – it will be worth it!

About the Author

Valerie Parsons

Dr. Parsons served as an elementary teacher, middle school teacher, and instructional coach, followed by 15 years as a district office coordinator in professional learning, curriculum and instruction, and health education. She has been an Assistant Principal and Principal where she worked in Title I schools and implemented the MTSS framework. For her dissertation, Valerie analyzed pre-existing data before and after implementing MTSS, which showed statistically significant results in reading achievement. Valerie is dedicated to helping schools improve student learning with MTSS. She believes the effective use of data, through Branching Minds' technology, supports the work of teachers and administrators to make learning equitable for ALL students.



BOY Gameplan Checklist

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Summer: STRUCTURES
<input type="checkbox"/>	Choose Your MTSS Team
<input type="checkbox"/>	Choose data reports to use with your MTSS Team that analyze last year's data, focusing on the school's health.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use the Self-Assessment of MTSS Implementation (SAMI) to determine next steps
<input type="checkbox"/>	Based on your MTSS Team's findings from your EOY data and the SAMI, create the vision and goals for your MTSS framework
<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine the cadence for the 3 types of MTSS meetings
<input type="checkbox"/>	Determine how your intervention/ enrichment blocks will be organized
<input type="checkbox"/>	Revise Your master schedule and the school calendar to include time for meetings and intervention blocks
<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop communication protocols to set patterns for sharing progress, success, and revisions throughout MTSS Implementation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Plan Professional Learning for the teacher inservice and new teacher induction

BOY Gameplan Checklist

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	1st Month of School: SYSTEMS
<input type="checkbox"/>	WEEK 1: Implement school-wide behavioral expectations and classroom management plans
<input type="checkbox"/>	WEEK 2: Provide differentiated professional learning and support to help teachers complete intervention plans
<input type="checkbox"/>	WEEK 2: The MTSS Team meets with each grade-level team
<input type="checkbox"/>	WEEK 2: Complete intervention plans for the first round of intervention groups
<input type="checkbox"/>	WEEK 3: The first week of intervention groups begins!

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2nd & 3rd Month of School: IMPLEMENTATION DRIVERS
<input type="checkbox"/>	MONTH 1: Administer the Fall universal screener assessment
<input type="checkbox"/>	MONTH 2: Administer Grade-level self-assessment
<input type="checkbox"/>	MONTH 2-3: Plan for ongoing professional learning and coaching to build capacity
<input type="checkbox"/>	MONTH 2-3: Check for fidelity of interventions and student progress monitoring
<input type="checkbox"/>	MONTH 3: Conduct Individual Student Support Meetings

About Branching Minds



Branching Minds is an MTSS software platform that brings together innovative, easy to use technology with the latest insights from the learning sciences to help drive student and school success, while making the work of teachers and administrators easier and more effective. **And, we are partners each step of the way, with tailored professional development and award-winning customer service.**



“Branching Minds gives you exactly what you need to do to accomplish the purpose of MTSS. We need to monitor the impact of our core instruction. Are 80% of our students in that Tier report, are they meeting our defined outcomes? And then, we have to be able to identify students who need additional support, which it does. And then we need to see if that additional support is making an impact for those students. Branching Minds does that.”

**Angela Plugge, Director of Learning
Waverly School District, Nebraska**

— — — — —
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a reality.



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