



MTSS Buy-in and Mobilization Guide



BRANCHING
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Welcome!

Welcome to the Branching Minds Buy-In and Mobilization Guide! At Branching Minds, we have worked with hundreds of schools and districts across the country, supporting their transition to a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) as a foundation for all students. Transitioning your campus to MTSS does not have to be overwhelming or daunting, although we understand the word “transition” can be scary at times. This MTSS Buy-in and Mobilization Guide provides the essentials to prepare for the transition to MTSS so we can make the change easier for schools.

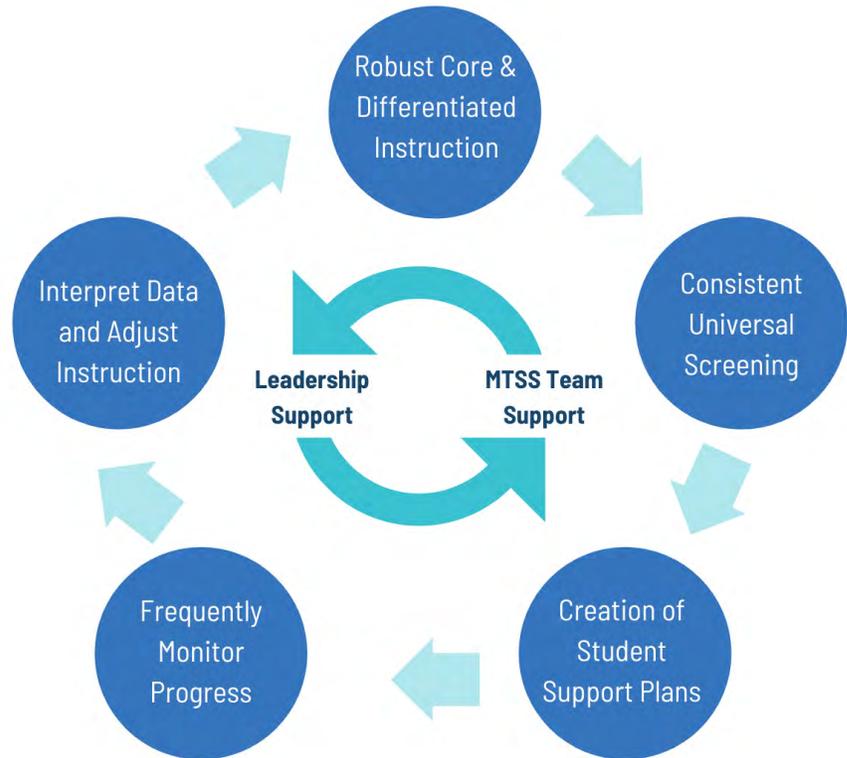
You may be asking yourself, *“Why would we transition to MTSS now, given that we are just beginning to emerge from the pivot between remote learning and in-person instruction?”*. At Branching Minds, we believe that there has never been a better time to transition to MTSS. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, MTSS uses a multi-tiered support foundation that wraps around a school’s entire student body. Data is gathered and utilized during problem-solving to address academic and non-academic (attendance, social-emotional, etc.) needs. Schools and districts that have already made the shift to MTSS have found that they improved education for all students, gained efficiencies, and prevented students from “slipping through the cracks.”

What is MTSS?

To kick off the transition to MTSS, schools must develop a solid understanding of what MTSS entails. MTSS is a multi-tiered support foundation that wraps around the entire student body and uses data-driven problem-solving to address academic and non-academic (attendance/social-emotional, etc.) needs. MTSS includes the following:

- Robust core curriculum with differentiated instruction that is accessible and provides supports for all students.
- The use of valid and reliable universal screeners for all students;
- The creation of student support plans based upon universal screening data;
- The frequent use of reliable progress monitoring;
- The creation of “student support/decision teams” to consistently review student progress and make adjustments to the duration and intensity of planned intervention, based upon data; and
- The support from leadership to provide frequent and clear messaging, professional development for staff, time for teachers to collaborate, and other needed resources to ensure MTSS is successful.

Wrap-Around MTSS Cycle Of Support



Related Resource:

 [The Ultimate Guide to MTSS](#)

 [Demystifying the MTSS Mystery](#)

What does MTSS look like everyday in school?

As schools begin the transition to MTSS, it is essential to think about what MTSS looks like every day in school. The tiered framework below can be used as a framework for organization, beginning with utilizing a robust core curriculum and differentiating instruction:

Tier 1: Whole class core differentiated instruction;

Tier 2: Whole class core differentiated instruction + additional targeted instruction (often small group);

Tier 3: Whole class core differentiated instruction + additional targeted instruction (often small group) + intensive intervention (sometimes 1:1). The intensity/frequency and duration of the intervention are considered based upon data.

Grade-level content is always provided during core instruction while scaffolding students with “just-in-time support” so they can access such content.

Tier 3 - 1-5%

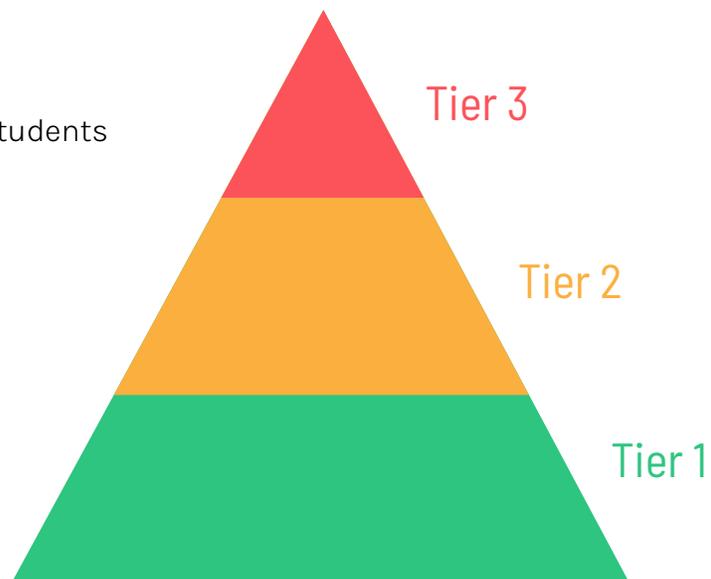
High Intensity Support for individual students

Tier 2 - 5-15%

Early Intervention - High Efficiency
Strategic Support Using Small Group
Interventions

Tier 1 - 100%

Differentiated Instruction for
Promotion and Prevention - Using
Best Evidence Based Supports



Additional Resources:

[Making MTSS/RTI Work More Efficient Through Groups](#)

[What do the tiers mean in Response to Intervention \(RTI\) / Multi Tiered System of Supports \(MTSS\)?](#)

Developing a deep understanding of core instruction, differentiation, and intervention

Ensuring your staff has a deep understanding of the key terms below will help to mobilize all teams and allow everyone to be on the same page.

Key Terms

Core Instruction



The instructional strategies used routinely with all students in a general education setting are considered 'core instruction.'

Differentiation



Tailoring instruction for ALL of your student's readiness levels, interests, and learning preferences.

(Tomlinson & Moon, 2013)

Intervention



An Intervention is an intentional, research or evidence-based program, instructional activity or strategy to target a specific academic/social emotional/behavioral skill. Interventions are delivered with a specific frequency and duration over a defined number of weeks, depending on the level of need. Intervention may be delivered in a variety of contexts such as small groups, one on one, afterschool, and tutoring.

Leadership in schools implementing MTSS

Providing confident, consistent leadership in schools has always been critical, and now more than ever, as we move forward beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. Leadership must be able to pivot quickly to meet the needs of teachers and students and establish trust, caring, and transparency throughout their campuses. According to recent research, leadership that frequently clarifies and communicates its vision connects with stakeholders and creates accountability and transparency, making lasting change. (Deshler, 2021)

Actively providing frequent and clarifying messaging from school leadership regarding the “why” behind MTSS as a foundation is critical to affecting change. Reminding staff that the transition to MTSS means that all students will have their needs met is a powerful message and provides a refreshing perspective on why this shift is significant at this time. Leadership must also provide professional development for staff to learn MTSS processes and include specific time each week for teachers to collaborate and connect. Finally, leadership must invest in the resources necessary to ensure MTSS is successful (e.g., valid and reliable assessments to screen and monitor progress) so all students may achieve improved educational outcomes. Transparency throughout the process, including discussions regarding successes, challenges, and investments in resources, will help pave the way for teams to feel supported and motivated throughout the implementation and beyond.

Additional Resource:

 [Leadership and the system-level work](#)

Setting the stage—managing the change management process

Successfully managing the challenge of the change management process is critical while transitioning from a traditional support model to MTSS. Ensuring success requires taking the time to think thoroughly and plan the change management process. The following tips are helpful when engaging in change management in schools:

- Find exemplars for modeling best practices and collaboration;
- Concisely and frequently communicate policy changes;
- Start with and return to the “why” [of MTSS] in your communications;
- Check-in regularly through quick surveys and questionnaires to see how the new policies are going;
- Create individual touchpoints with those that may be resistant to change. (Airiodion & Crolley, 2021); and
- Finally, consider creating a handbook outlining the change, reasons why for the change, protocols, etc. to allow for team members to be able to have a quick resource for any questions/concerns.

When change occurs, some may feel overwhelmed or tempted to slip back into old patterns. As a result, thoroughly thinking through the above bullets can help avoid this from happening and instead create excitement about providing a wraparound foundation to meet all students’ needs.

Additional Resources:

-  [Transitioning from a Discrepancy Model to MTSS](#)
-  [How to create a seamless data-driven school culture through MTSS?](#)
-  [Benefits of and Strategies for Teacher Collaboration In & Outside of MTSS](#)

Creating an MTSS handbook

As schools across the country shift to MTSS, many choose to create their own “MTSS School Handbook” to set expectations for new processes as well as create a framework to guide MTSS management. Handbooks can also provide an outline of expectations to ensure all stakeholders are on the same page. Schools can incorporate answers to the following questions as a guiding principle when creating the handbook:

- What is MTSS (and other relevant terms such as core instruction, differentiation, and intervention)?
- Why are we transitioning to MTSS?
- How does MTSS support our current practices?
- How will our current practices, procedures, documentation and/or policies need to change?
- What will the new protocols specifically look like with MTSS?
- What is the ultimate outcome desired from the change to MTSS?
- What will it take to make these changes?
- What resources will be available to transition to MTSS?

Handbooks help create consistency and provide reminders of the importance of transitioning to MTSS. If you would like support to create a handbook for your school, [do not hesitate to contact us.](#)

Universal screening students

Universal screeners provide valuable data about each student's areas of strength and need, and some screeners offer a snapshot of historical progress. Universal screeners should be easy to administer and indicate student's areas of need to monitor progress. Elementary schools should assess students with a valid, reliable universal screener that includes benchmarks (teachers should give benchmark assessments three times a year (beginning, middle, and end of year)). In secondary schools, the state assessments and/or district common core assessments serve to universally screen students. The data from universally screening all students help keep a finger on the pulse of any changes in student learning.

Additional Resources:

 [The Role of Universal Screening in RTI/MTSS](#)

 [Webinar - Using Screening Data to Tier Students for RTI/MTSS](#)

Determining if current core instruction is equitably meeting your student's needs

To implement high-quality instruction, teachers need to create a classroom environment conducive to learning. According to the IRIS Center Peabody College at Vanderbilt University, high quality instruction includes using “a standards-based curriculum and evidenced-based practices.” (The Iris Center, 2021) It is expected that 80% of students have their needs met by the core curriculum (as measured by universal screening), as research clearly states that “teachers who follow evidence-based best practices in curriculum and pedagogy are most likely to foster academic progression.” (Dorn, Hancock, Sarakatsannis, & Viruleg, 2021). To mobilize and get buy-in for the transformation process to MTSS, schools can quickly begin by analyzing their current core practices. To tackle this challenge and understand if the core curriculum is serving the student body, ask the following questions:

- **Is there a core curriculum in place, and if so, is it being used with fidelity?** Robust professional development regarding the core curriculum and peer-to-peer teacher observations can be helpful when analyzing fidelity to the core curriculum.
- **Are instructional best practices such as differentiated instruction being used consistently?** Research has shown that when teachers consider the content, process, products, or the learning environment when planning for instruction, they are better able to meet the needs of all learners. (Weselby, 2021) Peer-to-peer teacher observations, protected teacher collaboration time, and highlighting instructors to model differentiation are all helpful strategies for evaluating instructional best practices.

Additional Resource:



[Download the Core Workout Worksheet](#)

Providing robust intervention and progress monitoring

Once students are identified with specific needs based upon multiple factors (universal screening data, observations, collaboration in team meetings, etc.), evidence-based intervention can be applied for areas of need and closely monitored. For intervention support to be successful:

- A specific area of need is targeted with a research-based intervention;
- It is carried out for a specific number of weeks, based upon the evidence of its success;
- The staff member responsible for providing the intervention is documented along with the time/place intervention is provided; and
- The intervention is frequently monitored for progress.

Progress monitoring of the given intervention should be administered weekly or biweekly, depending upon the students' needs, during small group or intervention time.

For additional information about intervention and progress monitoring tools, The National Center on Intensive Intervention at <https://intensiveintervention.org/> provides information about available intervention and progress monitoring probes that experts have reviewed.

Additional Resources:

 [5 Considerations When Selecting a RTI/MTSS Intervention Management](#)

 [Audit of use of intervention programs in MTSS/RTI - a worksheet](#)

 [Intervention Planning in MTSS: How to Balance Best Practices and Feasibility](#)

 [Progress Monitoring for MTSS at the Secondary Level](#)

Creating an MTSS team

Creating a successful MTSS team is an essential part of transitioning to MTSS processes. According to Dr. Eva Dundas at Branching Minds, the following stakeholders should be on the MTSS team:

- 1 Administrative/ Leadership Representative**

Administrative/Leadership Representative provides leadership and monitors fidelity to the core curriculum, intervention, progress monitoring, and plans/communicates the change management process.
- 2 MTSS Team Coordinator/ Facilitator**

MTSS Team Coordinator/Facilitator coordinates MTSS team meetings, provides expertise in data analysis, and identifies trends in student/staff need across the school.
- 3 Grade-level/ Content Area Representatives**

Grade-level/Content Area Representatives attend MTSS meetings to identify trends across the grade-level/content area, and provide data/background information on the student being discussed (in the classroom teacher's absence).
- 4 Specialists**

Specialists (rotating members including ELL teacher, speech/language pathologist, intervention teacher, behavior specialist) provide expertise regarding interventions and remediation, gather progress monitoring data, and collaborate with classroom teachers regarding differentiated instruction.
- 5 Classroom teacher(s)**

Classroom teacher(s) (rotating member) provide experience with and knowledge (including background information) of the student being discussed and ensure next steps are documented and communicated with the student and/or family. (Dundas, 2021)

Additional Resources:

 [For more information, check out the blog post “Creating Successful MTSS Teams”](#)

 [MTSS Requires Capacity Building](#)

MTSS meetings and eliminating unnecessary meetings

Through Branching Mind's work across the country, many educators have expressed concern about the time they spend in meetings and feeling like they are not making any real progress. Through the transition to MTSS, these extraneous school meetings can be trimmed to reduce redundancy and to be as efficient as possible by moving to the following three student support meeting types:

1

The School Level MTSS Meeting

This meeting is conducted three times a year following the administration of universal screening assessments. The goal of this meeting is to understand the health of school-level MTSS practice by looking at the percent of students who are adequately being served by the core, the equity of instruction across demographics, grades, and classrooms, and improvement in student outcome measures since the last meeting. These metrics are used to evaluate the quality of practice across tier 1, 2, and 3 levels of support and guide school-level improvement plans.

2

The Grade/Content Team MTSS

This meeting is conducted by each grade or content team on a monthly basis to discuss all students receiving tier 2 and 3 level support. The goal of this meeting is to ensure students at a greater level of risk are receiving support and making progress, that patterns/trends in student growth are identified, and that plans are adjusted or support is provided to teachers based on observed trends in student need.

3

The Individual Problem-solving

This meeting provides the time and space for individualized deep dive problem-solving for students not making sufficient progress when supported by the Grade/Content Team, e.g. students not making progress after receiving tier 2 and tier 3 level support.

Recommended MTSS Meeting Types

MEETING GOALS	MEETING FREQUENCY
THE SCHOOL LEVEL MTSS MEETING	
Evaluate tier movement, growth, and equity across school	3x a year (after each screening period)
GRADE/CONTENT TEAM MTSS MEETING	
Create group plans, identify patterns of need, and monitor student progress	1 planning period a month for each grade or content team
INDIVIDUAL PROBLEM-SOLVING MTSS MEETING	
Create, evaluate, and adjust plans for individual students	½ or full day, every other week or weekly (depending on population need)

Additional Resources:

 [MTSS Meetings Guide](#)

 [Webinar - Effective meeting structures in a multi-tiered system of supports \(MTSS\) / response to intervention \(RTI\) practice](#)

Check-in with staff often!

Guiding your campus through the change management process and successfully adopting MTSS is the goal. As a result, there must be frequent and clear communication about the transition to MTSS. It is essential to check in consistently with staff, students, and families to determine how the changes are being received. (Airiodion & Crolley, 2021) Leadership can also set specific times throughout the school year to remind staff about the importance of shifting to MTSS, and ensure there is clarity on why it is so essential.

Checklist for mobilization

- Level set understanding of key terms (MTSS, core instruction, differentiation, intervention, universal screening and progress monitoring) with staff
- Set the stage for change - manage the change management process
- Create your MTSS Team
- Universally screening students
- Check fidelity to core curriculum and differentiated instruction
- Ensure access to robust evidence-based interventions and reliable progress monitoring tools
- Confirm MTSS Team Meetings are occurring per recommended schedule
- Check in with staff regularly and incorporate frequent and clear messaging about the purpose and progress of the MTSS transition

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About the Branching Minds solution

Branching Minds is an MTSS/RTI system-level education 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 teachers and administrators work easier and more effective. Branching Minds connects data, systems, interventions, and stakeholders so that educators, administrators, and families can work better together to support students' holistic needs. To learn more, request a demo [here](#).

About the Author

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Branching Minds Helps Educators

Understand school health and wellness across the district

Target approach to strengthen Behavior/SEL intervention practice

Avoid overidentification or underreferral of student subgroups