



MTSS Guide for Families and Community Members

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Welcome!

Welcome to the Branching Minds Guide for Families! As a special education teacher, Branching Minds consultant, university supervisor, and a mom, it has weighed heavily on my mind that there are many online resources for educators regarding MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Support) but not as many resources for parents and community members. It's well known that parents and community members play an essential role in a student's success. As a result, this MTSS Guide for Families and Community Members resource guide has been created to provide critical information about MTSS and breakdown jargon. At Branching Minds, we have worked with hundreds of districts and thousands of schools across the country, facilitating their transition to MTSS as a wrap-around organizational structure for all students, educators, families, and their communities.

MTSS is a support foundation for the entire student body and community. MTSS uses problem-solving to address academic and non-academic (attendance/social-emotional, behavior, etc.) needs and supports the whole student body.



MTSS: Key Terms

Core Instruction: The instructional strategies used routinely with all students in a general education setting are considered “core instruction.”

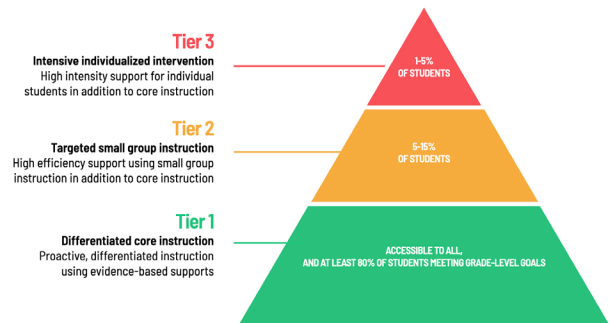
Differentiation: Tailoring instruction for ALL student’s readiness levels, interests, strengths, and learning preferences. (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013)

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL): The curriculum and/or strategies taught are specifically designed to develop the skill set for understanding and managing emotions, building resilience, problem-solving, and developing healthy relationships. Students learn from explicit instruction as well as from the actions and behaviors they are observing from others. (Sutton, 2021)

Intervention: Intervention is a program or set of steps to help students improve in a specific area of need. Intervention can provide support with academic, behavioral, and/or social-emotional needs. The interventions provided to students should be research-based, explicitly matched to student’s needs, set for a certain number of weeks, and then frequently reviewed for progress.

Universal Screening: Universal screeners provide valuable information about each student’s areas of strength and need, and can offer a snapshot of progress over time. Screeners are given at regular intervals during the school year. The data from universally screening students helps educators keep

abreast of any changes in student learning.



Tiers: MTSS, as a foundation, provides academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions organized into tiers (or levels) of support.

Tier 1: Teachers provide differentiated core instruction to the whole class (ALL students);

Tier 2: Teachers provide differentiated core instruction to the whole class + additional targeted instruction for students in need (often in small groups);

Tier 3: Teachers provide differentiated core instruction to the whole class + additional targeted instruction (often small group) + intensive intervention (sometimes provided in one-to-one settings). The intensity/frequency and duration of the intervention are considered based upon need.

Progress Monitoring: Progress monitoring is used frequently to assess a student’s progress to determine the effectiveness of intervention support provided to a student.

What does MTSS include?



Differentiated instruction

High-quality, differentiated instruction, a quality core curriculum, and dedicated social-emotional learning



Screening

The use of valid and reliable universal screeners for all students



Intervention plans

The creation of research-based intervention support plans created for specific academic and non-academic (social-emotional, behavior, attendance, etc.) needs



Progress monitoring

The frequent use of reliable progress monitoring



Data-based decision making

The creation of “student support/decision teams” at school to consistently review student progress and make adjustments to the duration and intensity of planned intervention, based upon data



Coaching & PD

The support from school leadership to provide professional development and other needed resources to ensure MTSS is successful



Team collaboration

Routine collaboration regarding a student’s areas of strength and areas of need among educators, families, and community members

MTSS & Special Education: Why Are Schools All Over the Country Transitioning to MTSS?

MTSS improves education for ALL students. Student's areas of strength are understood and tapped into daily for deeper learning to occur, and all students can receive support for academic, social-emotional, and behavioral areas of need. With MTSS, the days of a student "slipping through the cracks" are gone and replaced with a supportive foundation that requires early intervention. MTSS requires that quality education is provided equitably to all students.



MTSS BEFORE Special Education

MTSS can sometimes be mistaken as a route for a student to receive a special education designation. This mistake should not ever be the case; MTSS supports the entire student body. When schools transition to MTSS, any student can receive intervention as soon as an area of need is identified through regular universal screening. MTSS allows educators to apply interventions to students requiring support, determine if the intervention is working, and move forward with different/more intensive interventions based upon progress monitoring results. As a result, ALL students receive more support, and fewer students qualify for special education thanks to early intervention.



MTSS and Special Education/Gifted Education

As mentioned earlier, MTSS focuses on differentiating instruction as a foundational practice. MTSS meets the needs of ALL learners, including students challenged with disabilities and gifted students. It's important to note that with each MTSS tier, evidence-based instruction and interventions can be utilized as enrichment, including the early identification of gifted learners or to meet a student's specific IEP goals. (Rodriguez & Novak, 2021)

MTSS and Family/Community Involvement: How Can Parents and Community Members Be Involved?



Touch base!

Families and caregivers are the earliest teachers for our students. Reach out to your student's teacher via email or phone, during conferences, after school, etc., and share your thoughts about your student's strengths, as well as any academic, social-emotional, and/or behavioral concerns.



Ask for data!

Ask your student's teachers for regular updates regarding universal screening and progress monitoring results.



Ask questions!

Your student's teacher can provide information regarding the high-quality curriculum being taught and the research behind any interventions provided.

Where Can I Go for More Information About MTSS?

For additional information about MTSS, visit Branching Minds, click the "Resources" tab, and click "All Resources" to access MTSS blog posts, upcoming webinars, and guides.

About the author



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Citations

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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.

“ Branching Minds provides so much more than just a solution to our problem. Branching Minds has illuminated a path forward for developing the foundational systems and processes we need to truly personalize supports for our students. In addition, Branching Minds multiplies our capacity to identify and respond to student needs.

— Sarah Guerrero, Principal,
Northbrook Middle School, Spring Branch ISD, TX



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