



BRANCHING
MINDS

Leadership Protocols To Increase Engagement and Buy-In for MTSS

A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL LEADERS





Hey Leaders, yep YOU!

Whether you're a seasoned leader looking to refine your strategies, an emerging leader eager to learn new tricks, or someone on the cusp of stepping into an influential position, this guide is for you!

Reflecting on my own journey through school leadership and ed tech, I found myself wishing for practical tools at every turn. Armed with renewed vigor, a little extra time, and lots of love, I've crafted this guide to empower leaders like you with actionable tactics – many of the **same tools and tactics that have delighted school leaders around the country** as they work with Branching Minds consultants to build strong, data-focused teams.

I hope these tactics will help ignite positive change, engage staff members in new ways of thinking, and propel student outcomes to new heights.




- Brittany Shurley
Director of Professional Services
Branching Minds

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Forward

In leading implementation for a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), it's not uncommon to encounter moments where momentum falters. Despite our best intentions, we fall back on familiar practices...



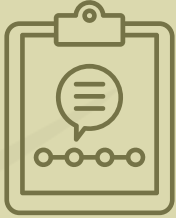
Prioritizing comfort over what's truly best for our students.



A reluctance to question the status quo, fearing that challenging existing methods might imply criticism of our colleagues' efforts.



Using phrases like "We are data-driven," without the understanding and practice to back it up.



Hesitation to rock the boat, afraid of stepping on anyone's toes.

But - that's where the magic happens, in those moments of discomfort and uncertainty. It's where growth begins. **How do you, one person, help reignite the spark?**

To help educators change the narrative and evolve individually and collectively, Branching Minds' Professional Services team began to use highly structured leadership protocols in our professional learning workshops. The impact was immediate - conversations became more dynamic, engagement levels soared, and leaders nationwide began sharing stories of how these strategies transformed their meetings and professional development sessions upon their return to campus.

NOW, IT'S YOUR TURN...

to harness the power of these leadership protocols. Help your teams to challenge traditional practices and embrace new perspectives - without feeling discouraged or criticized. And enhance your own effectiveness as a leader.

Identify Your Leadership Challenge

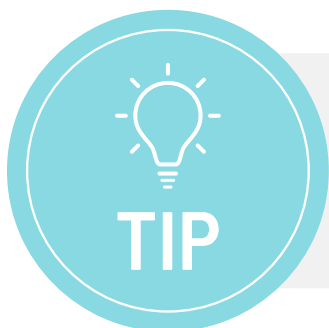


Effective leaders have a knack for widening perspectives, helping teams see beyond the immediate hurdles to the possibilities on the horizon.

Recognizing the leadership challenge is the first step. These challenges are complex, weaving together different elements that affect both team performance and organizational objectives. Whether it's a lack of unity, communication glitches, or hurdles in putting plans into action, these challenges demand our attention and proactive solutions.

Once you've identified the leadership challenge, it's time to tackle it head-on, using a protocol that provides structure and insight to help teams embrace change and chart a new course.

Leadership Challenge	Protocol
Your team has experienced repeated failures in implementing new initiatives, leading to a breakdown in trust among team members.	Premortem Protocol
Your team's current practices are impeding progress, but the prospect of identifying and implementing necessary changes feels overwhelming.	Stop Start Continue Protocol
Your team is encountering obstacles and uncertainties in executing a particular project.	How Might We Protocol
Your team lacks a clear sense of purpose and commitment towards a specific goal or doesn't know how to drive this commitment forward with others.	Head Heart Hand Protocol
Your team struggles to grasp the importance of data-driven decision-making.	Data-Driven Reflection Protocol



These protocols are versatile and can be combined or modified to fit your needs. They are flexible to help address myriad challenges, and you will find that as teams become skilled with these leadership protocols, they will find ever more creative ways to use them!

Pick Your Protocol(s)

Anticipate roadblocks before they arise with the premortem tactic. Gather your team and envision a future where MTSS implementation has failed catastrophically. Then, ask: What went wrong? By identifying potential pitfalls proactively, your team can develop contingency plans and mitigate risks, ensuring a smoother journey toward success.

PREMORTEM PROTOCOL

2


TIPS AND TACTICS TO SOCIALIZING NEW INITIATIVES AND GOALS

Premortem Planning Tool

When you're planning to launch something new, it's natural to feel hesitant since there are many ways things can go wrong. By thinking about failure before it happens, you can plan to stop it in its tracks. Use the Premortem Planning Tool to think through all the possible issues before you get started.

- Identify the new change you plan to implement.
- Imagine that it's the end of the time period you set for successfully implementing the change, and implementation failed.
- Make a list of every possible reason that the implementation failed.

It's best to use notecards, sticky notes, or an electronic version of this (i.e., Miro, Jamboard, spreadsheet, etc.), with one reason per notecard, sticky note, or cell.
- Group the notecards, sticky notes, or cells by emerging themes.
- Create a plan to mitigate the risk (lessen or eliminate the risk) or investigate the risk (monitor the risk).
- Assign each part of the plan to your teammates.

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MTSS Leadership Scenario

As the middle school principal, you're gearing up to launch a new MTSS initiative aimed at improving student behavior. However, past attempts at similar initiatives have fallen short due to a lack of teacher buy-in and inconsistent implementation.

To avoid repeating history, you gather your leadership team for a **premortem** session.

Together, you brainstorm potential pitfalls:

- Resistance from veteran educators
- Inadequate training
- Insufficient resources

With these insights, you develop contingency plans to address each potential challenge, ensuring a smoother implementation process and greater chances of success.

 [Download Premortem Planning Tool](#)



MTSS Leadership Scenario

Chronic absenteeism is at an all-time high, and it's affecting academic achievement. As the Director of Student Services, you convene a meeting with your team to complete the **Start Stop Continue Protocol**. Together, you identify ineffective practices such as passive outreach methods and inconsistent follow-up procedures.

You decide to **STOP** these ineffective practices and **START** implementing new approaches, such as personalized attendance interventions and proactive parent engagement strategies. Additionally, you decide to **CONTINUE** effective practices like data analysis and collaboration with community partners to [address underlying causes of absenteeism](#).

STOP START CONTINUE PROTOCOL

Challenge yourself and your team to reflect on current practices and identify what to stop, start, and continue. What practices should we stop doing because they no longer serve our goals? What new approaches should we start implementing to drive progress? What current practices should we continue because they contribute to our success? This tactic promotes self-awareness and encourages adaptive behaviors, propelling your team toward growth and improvement.

IMPLEMENTATION 101 FOR SCHOOL MTSS TEAMS • MAKING PLANS TO CONTINUE TO IMPROVE PRACTICE AND ENGAGEMENT

Implementation Data Reflection: On Your Own

Now that you've explored a wealth of implementation data from your setting, spend some time reflecting on it as a whole using this Start Stop Continue activity template. Be prepared to share your thinking with your team.

Start What should we start doing?	
Stop What should we stop doing?	
Continue What should we continue doing?	

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Download Implementation Data Reflection: On Your Own

IMPLEMENTATION 101 FOR SCHOOL MTSS TEAMS • MAKING PLANS TO CONTINUE TO IMPROVE PRACTICE AND ENGAGEMENT

Implementation Data Reflection: Team

Now that you've explored a wealth of implementation data from your setting, spend some time reflecting on it with your team.

Start What should we start doing?	
Stop What should we stop doing?	
Continue What should we continue doing?	

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Download Implementation Data Reflection: Team

HOW MIGHT WE PROTOCOL

Transform challenges into opportunities with the “How Might We” tactic. When faced with obstacles or uncertainties, frame them as open-ended questions: How might we improve student engagement in remote learning? How might we enhance family involvement in the MTSS process? This tactic fosters creativity and invites innovative solutions, empowering your team to approach problems with optimism and ingenuity.


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TIPS AND TACTICS TO SOCIALIZE NEW INITIATIVES AND GOALS

How Might We...? Planning Tool

A problem on its own can seem daunting. Transform a problem or observation from any idea into a solvable question. Use the How Might We Planning Tool to rephrase problems as questions and move from panic mode to solution mode.

PROBLEM	HOW MIGHT WE...?
Teams aren't utilizing the new curriculum materials we adopted.	How might we encourage teams to utilize the new curriculum materials we adopted?

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MTSS Leadership Scenario

Secondary literacy scores are stagnating in your district. As the Curriculum and Instruction Director, you gather your instructional leadership team to brainstorm solutions. Using the “How Might We” protocol, you frame the challenge as an open-ended question: How might we [enhance literacy skills](#) among secondary school students?

Together, you generate ideas:

- Daily reading sessions
- Author visits
- Integrating literacy into other subjects like science and social studies

By reframing challenges as opportunities for creativity and innovation, your team explores new approaches and strategies to support student success in literacy.

 [Download How Might We Planning Tool](#)



MTSS Leadership Scenario

As the MTSS Coordinator for your school district, you recognize the importance of aligning school leaders' intellectual, emotional, and practical engagement with the program. In a professional development session, you lead campus teams through the “**Head Heart Hand**” protocol.

1. You begin by exploring the intellectual merits of MTSS, discussing its evidence-based practices and potential impact on student outcomes.
2. Next, you delve into the emotional aspect, connecting MTSS to their values and aspirations for student success.
3. Finally, you guide campus teams in defining concrete actions to translate their beliefs into practice, outlining specific steps for implementing MTSS strategies in their classrooms and support services.

HEART HEAD HAND PROTOCOL




Engage your team on a deeper level with the “Head Heart Hand” tactic. Invite them to connect intellectually (Head), emotionally (Heart), and practically (Hand) with the MTSS initiative. What are the intellectual merits of MTSS? How does it resonate with our values and aspirations? What concrete actions can we take to translate our beliefs into practice? By aligning their head, heart, and hand, your team will cultivate a sense of purpose and commitment towards MTSS adoption.


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READINESS 101 FOR SCHOOL MTSS TEAMS • USING BRANCHING MINDS TO ENHANCE MTSS WORKFLOWS

Heart Head Hand Protocol

IDENTIFYING STUDENT NEEDS WITH THE COHORT ASSESSMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT

<p>HEART (EMOTIONAL)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who will love it?• Why will they be delighted by it?• Do you love it?• Who will feel anxious about it?• Why will they feel anxious about it?• Do you feel anxious about it?	
<p>HEAD (LOGICAL)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Will this make sense to educators in our setting?• Is it useful?• What policy or priority does this fulfill?• How is this different or better than what we already do?	
<p>HAND (PRACTICAL)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can we make this happen easily?• Does it rely on anything else?• Is it realistic to ask people to engage with this feature or in this work?	

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[Download Head Heart Hand Planning Tool](#)



MTSS Leadership Scenario

As a high school principal, you're committed to [improving graduation rates](#) and college readiness among your students. To inform your strategies, you lead your leadership team in a **data-driven reflection** session. Together, you analyze student performance data, attendance records, and behavior data to identify trends and patterns.

Through facilitated discussions, you glean insights into factors contributing to student success and areas for improvement. Using these insights, you collaboratively develop a continuum of instructional strategies and interventions that can be used to create plans tailored to meet the needs of each student.

DATA-DRIVEN REFLECTION PROTOCOL

Being “data-driven” isn’t just a buzzword – it’s a critical mindset. Start by encouraging your team to delve into data, examining student performance metrics, attendance records, and behavior data. Then, facilitate reflective discussions centered on key questions: What trends do we observe? What insights can we glean? How might this inform our instructional strategies? By embracing data-driven reflection, your team will gain clarity and direction for their next steps.

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DATA-DRIVEN REFLECTION TACTIC

Hypothesis Statements: Protocol

It's easy to get overwhelmed by all the data, and this makes taking next steps a challenge. Use the Hypothesis Statements method to outline the result that will be achieved by taking a specific action and detailing data that's needed to confirm it.

We believe that if we	make this change,
then we will achieve	this outcome.

We will know this is true when we see that:	quantitative data;
	qualitative data; and
	performance indicator change.

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[Download Hypothesis Statement Protocol](#)

DATA-DRIVEN REFLECTION TACTIC

Hypothesis Statements: Example

It's easy to get overwhelmed by all the data, and this makes taking next steps a challenge. Use the Hypothesis Statements method to outline the result that will be achieved by taking a specific action and detailing data that's needed to confirm it.

We believe that if we	use Project GLAD Guided Language Acquisition designed strategies to teach content knowledge.
then we will achieve	improved performances in reading, writing, science, and social studies for all learners.

We will know this is true when we see that:	there is a 20 percent decrease in the number of students needing Tier 2 or Tier 3 levels of support in reading, writing, science, and social studies;
	teachers report higher levels of teamwork among learners; and
	students are engaged in productive and receptive language tasks that require the use of grade-level content knowledge.

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[Download Example](#)

DATA-DRIVEN REFLECTION TACTIC

Hypothesis Statements: Template

It's easy to get overwhelmed by all the data, and this makes taking next steps a challenge. Use the Hypothesis Statements method to outline the result that will be achieved by taking a specific action and detailing data that's needed to confirm it.

We believe that if we	
then we will achieve	

We will know this is true when we see that:	

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[Download Template](#)

3,000 Foot View to the 3 Foot View



STRATEGIC LEVEL

At the strategic level, leadership protocols serve as powerful tools for charting the path forward as you:

⇒ Define long-term goals

⇒ Identify strengths and weaknesses

⇒ Craft strategies for success

An example of strategic problem solving, or the 3,000-foot view, is a visioning workshop around MTSS that engages people's grandiose ideas, igniting their imagination, and vividly illustrating the organization's potential trajectory **without focusing on details**. By tapping into aspirations, values, and desired outcomes, these sessions foster unity and commitment among stakeholders, laying the groundwork for transformative change. Participants envision the ideal future of student support systems within their school or district.

OPERATIONAL LEVEL

Zooming into the ground level or the operational level, practitioners need opportunities to hone their craft and deepen their expertise in very specific areas within an MTSS.

Educators may engage in reflective practice workshops or meetings to pause, reflect, and refine their practice. For example, you might set up a team meeting to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement with reading intervention delivery for early elementary students. In a reflective practice workshop or collaborative meeting, provide structure for Introspection, peer feedback, and goal-setting, all in the context of data review.

You can use leadership protocols at both the strategic and operational levels to engage your staff and spark their imagination and commitment.

Leadership in a Multi-Tiered System of Supports is not without its challenges, but with the right strategies, success is within reach. I see it every day! As leaders, it's our responsibility to inspire change, challenge the status quo, and drive excellence. These protocols can help you realize the full potential of MTSS to ensure that every student (and educator!) receives the support they need to thrive.

About the Author



Brittany Shurley, Director of Professional Services

Britt has served students, educators, and leaders in various roles throughout her career, including as a classroom teacher, learning disabilities specialist, school-based leader, and district-level administrator. Brittany has extensive experience in facilitating the implementation of an MTSS at the district and school levels, and she is well known for her engaging, passionate, and practical approach to staff development.

About Branching Minds

- ✓ No more second-guessing or wasted time in providing support for your students.
- ✓ Get the visibility and insights you need to make well-informed decisions, confidently.
- ✓ The Branching Minds MTSS solution helps you create a sustainable infrastructure:
 - Professional development that deepens understanding and practice
 - An award-winning MTSS software platform that organizes and streamlines the entire MTSS process
 - Responsive customer service and support, every step of the way



Want to learn more about how Branching Minds could help you lead your district to MTSS success? [Request a free consultation today!](#)



I really appreciate that our Professional Development from Branching Minds is customized because we have different schools with different needs, with different human capital.

– *Krissy Martin, District MTSS Director, Roanoke Rapids Graded School District, NC*

