



Ed Tech Explainer

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7 Questions About Branching Minds MTSS Platform with CEO Maya Gat

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Keeping up with the thousands of ed tech solutions available to K–12 schools is challenging; startups and well-established providers alike are frequently announcing new features and integrations, expanding into new lanes, or contracting to focus on the areas in which they see the biggest impact for students. THE Journal's *7 Questions: Ed Tech Explainer* series gives ed tech leaders an opportunity to summarize their solution(s), explain how their product helps educators and schools, and give a quick overview for K–12 decision-makers – sort of an extended (but not too extended) elevator pitch.

For this installment of *7 Questions*, THE Journal asked **Branching Minds** CEO and Co-Founder Maya Gat to explain how its Multi-Tiered System of Supports solution works and how it impacts teachers, administrators, students, and learning outcomes. Find more info at BranchingMinds.com.

THE Journal: How does Branching Minds help educators to differentiate instruction for all learners and meet their academic and behavioral needs, and why is this more important post-pandemic?

MAYA GAT: The pandemic created an unprecedented impact on education – and the aftershocks from the disruption are far-reaching. Early data reveals widespread learning loss and lower academic achievement across subjects, with the steepest declines among low-income and Black and Hispanic communities, further widening the equity gaps in education. We are also seeing a sharp and startling rise in youth mental health problems, including increased depression, anxiety, and suicidality. Branching Minds leverages each districts' assessment data to help educators identify which students need support with academic, cognitive, social-emotional, and behavioral skills. The platform guides teachers through creating a support plan including all details necessary for effective evaluation of success and future problem-solving. This includes the creation of a

SMART goal, a progress-monitoring schedule, and details of the support approach, as well as recommendations for evidence-based learning supports. Teachers are able to seamlessly collaborate as a team to effectively monitor and report on student progress, while efficiently managing the communication and collaboration across staff and family to help students get back on track — both academically and socially-emotionally. By using data from validated assessments, teachers and administrators have immediate visibility into what each student needs, and the platform provides them with differentiated, evidence-based supports and resources to help meet each students' unique needs.

THE Journal: How can a comprehensive MTSS platform like Branching Minds reduce administrative workloads for teachers and school leaders, while improving system-level MTSS practice?

GAT: Branching Minds brings together advances in technology and the learning sciences to provide the infrastructure, data, and practice needed for a strong Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework. As a company, we understand how hard it is for teachers to have all of the insight and guidance they require to understand each student's needs, and support the whole learner. We also know how challenging and time-consuming it is for school systems to coordinate all the components of effectively identifying students who need support, making sure they actually get that support, and verifying that the support is actually helping. It requires data sharing, communication, and collaboration across stakeholders, access to evidence-based interventions, and, most importantly, visibility. Branching Minds brings all these components together in an easy-to-use platform that streamlines the work of MTSS, improves student outcomes, and reduces administrative burden for educators by enabling them to:

- Identify struggling students and gain insights into their strengths and challenges across academic, cognitive, behavioral and SEL skills
- Scaffold collaborative intervention plans guided by best practices
- Support group and individual plan creation
- Monitor students' progress and responses to interventions
- Curate learning support plans from our robust library of evidence-based intervention programs and resources
- Generate reports and letters to communicate student needs with families
- Achieve compliance with state mandates and federal regulations
- Recommend tiered levels of support for students based on reliable data
- See a daily and weekly summary of tasks planned to support students
- Plan and document grade-level and MTSS team meetings

THE Journal: How does the Branching Minds system connect with the other platforms in a district's ecosystem to streamline MTSS practice and provide a holistic view of students, classrooms, and schools?

GAT: Data interoperability is at the heart of everything we do at Branching Minds. We know that each district's data ecosystem is unique, and that connecting the dots in a secure and seamless way is essential for a strong MTSS framework. That is why Branching Minds connects with the key platforms that our district partners use in their MTSS practice. Our data team works closely with each district to ensure that data from student information systems, universal screeners, benchmarks, and progress-monitoring assessments are automatically ingested and translated into actionable insights within the Branching Minds dashboards.

Seamless, secure, and controlled exchange of usable data between applications is key to our product, and we are incredibly proud to have earned Project Unicorn's highest level certification badge for Data Interoperability.

THE Journal: How does the platform utilize data to equitably identify students recommended for academic and SEL support?

GAT: A key component of an effective MTSS practice is the ability to proactively leverage screening data to equitably match students to support levels. School districts often rely on teachers nominating students to receive more intensive levels of support after they have observed a student struggling with academics or social-emotional learning. A teacher referral process inevitably means that student support needs are deferred until a teacher can notice the need, and it relies on teachers to identify the need and do so equitably. On Branching Minds, administrators can use their universal screening assessments to apply cut-points based on their district's defined criteria, saving teachers time and effort and utilizing assessment data to equitably support students.

THE Journal: How does the Branching Minds platform provide school and district leadership with the real-time data insights needed to address disparities and allocate resources?

GAT: By leveraging universal screening data to automatically identify tier levels of support for the majority of students based on assessment scores and cut points, administrators gain immediate visibility into disparities across classes, grade levels, schools, or specific demographic groups. Educators are also alerted when students identified as needing intervention do not have a plan in place, giving them greater visibility to what areas of need or cohorts of students are not being supported appropriately. These data insights provide administrators with the information they need — in real-time — to address potential curricular or systemic issues like equitable resource allocation.

THE Journal: How does Branching Minds match student needs to evidence-based interventions?

GAT: Branching Minds has the most comprehensive library of evidence-based learning supports of any MTSS platform. Any resource that a school has purchased — as well as nearly 1,000 free evidence-based strategies, activities, and resources in our library — can be added directly to any student’s intervention plan.

Our learning science team has curated these resources from the most trusted and respected hubs of evidence-based supports, and each one has been reviewed and categorized based on the ESSA tiers of evidence guidelines. Supports are also categorized by other factors, including grade performance level, tier level of support, and English proficiency level, so our support recommendations align with each student’s individual constellation of needs.

THE Journal: What makes Branching Minds’ MTSS solution stand apart from other similar platforms in this space?

GAT: Unlike most other K–12 education companies, Branching Minds is a Benefit Corporation (B-Corp), which means that our governance structure prioritizes people over profit. We are deeply committed to empowering schools and teachers, and were named the No. 1 ed tech B Corp in the country by *Technology Magazine*. We also have earned numerous third-party certifications for our demonstrated commitment to research-based design, supporting learner variability, and prioritizing data interoperability. With the recent proliferation of ed tech platforms, these validators significantly differentiate us from other companies in this space.

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