Best Practices of MTSS Tiering to Facilitate Equity in Education
Hi! We are Branching Minds

Branching Minds is an MTSS/RTI System-level education platform that brings together learning science + technology + team collaboration to help drive student and school success.

- 10,000,000+ supported students
- 30 States
- 91% of our business comes from repeat clients
- 97% of school and district admins believe that BRM improved their ability to support students
Dr. Eva Dundas
Chief Learning Officer
Agenda

- Universal Screening Assessments
- Guidance on “Cut Points”
- Verifying Support Need
- Q&A
What is screening?

- A way to identify individuals at risk for a negative outcome
- A valid and reliable predictor of the negative outcome
- A quick, easy, non-invasive metric that requires more investigation

KNOW YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE
— AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

By AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION NEWS

The newest guidelines for hypertension:

NORMAL BLOOD PRESSURE
*Recommendations: Healthy lifestyle choices and yearly checks.

ELEVATED BLOOD PRESSURE
*Recommendations: Healthy lifestyle changes, reassessed in 3-6 months.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE / STAGE 1
*Recommendations: 10-year heart disease and stroke risk assessment. If less than 10% risk, lifestyle changes, reassessed in 3-6 months. If higher, lifestyle changes and medication with monthly follow-ups until BP controlled.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE / STAGE 2
*Recommendations: Lifestyle changes and 2 different classes of medicine, with monthly follow-ups until BP is controlled.

*Individual recommendations need to come from your doctor.
Source: American Heart Association's Journal Hypertension
Published Nov. 13, 2017
What is the point of universal screening?
Screening and Tiered Support

- A GOOD assessment given 3x/year
- Cut points for tier recommendation
- Support need verified
What makes for a good screening assessment

- **Validity**: Measures what it says it measures
- **Reliability**: Consistently measures it
- **Sensitivity**: Accurately predicts students will fall behind
- **Specificity**: Accurately predicts students who won’t
- **Practicality**: Short/easy to administer
- **Consequential Validity**: Not biased to a particular group
Sample population (100 students)
Sensitivity

Specificity
Low sensitivity (.6) = missed need (40%)
Low specificity = over identification
Sensitivity & Specificity of leading adaptive and CBM assessments
Sensitivity & Specificity of Using Reading Levels
What makes for a good screening assessment

- **Validity**: Measures what it says it measures
- **Reliability**: Consistently measures it
- **Sensitivity**: Accurately identifies students at risk
- **Specificity**: Accurately identifies students who aren’t
- **Practicality**: Short/easy to administer
- **Consequential Validity**: Not biased to a particular group
Screening and Tiered Support

A GOOD assessment given 3x/year

Cut points for tier recommendation

Support need verified
Use predetermined “cut points”

- Consistent, pre-existing criteria for performance expectations
- Established based on assessment norms

Which screener?
- NWEA MAP - Math (Overall)
Use *
- Score
- Percentile

Tier 2 Cut Score
- 25

Tier 3 Cut Score
- 10

Not showing students receiving services in total

Tier 3 (42 students) 13%

Tier 2 (36 student...
What are the right “cut points”

CONSISTENT ONES ACROSS DISTRICT
Use consistent “cut points”

Tier 3 - 10
Tier 2 - 25

School A
School B
Use consistent “cut points”

School A

Tier 3 - 20

Tier 2 - 40

School B

Tier 3 - 5

Tier 2 - 10
Screening and Tiered Support

A GOOD assessment given 3x/year

Cut points for tier recommendation

Support need verified
Verify Support Need

- What’s obvious to everyone: we need more than one data point to make support decisions for students

- What’s not clear: what that actually means
The "triangulation" problem: more screening does not equal better understanding of support need

(100 students * 20 min screener 1) + (100 students * 20 min screener 2) = 66.7 hours of testing
“Triangulating” with two quality screeners
“Triangulating” with two quality screeners

- Slight increase in specificity
- Slight decrease in sensitivity
“Triangulating” with NWEA MAP + F&P

- Slight increase in specificity
- MAJOR decrease in sensitivity
Additionally screen the “bubble”

Less time testing for but for same outcome
Verify Support Need

- **Disappointing reality:** for the best support need recommendation we can’t use a two assessment formula and have to verify at the individual student level.

- **Who needs to be reviewed:**
  - With a very strong practice where you are confident in tiering decisions during the interim – just need to review the students who have a tier change recommendation.
  
  - Otherwise, tier 3 and 2 recommendations, as well as students who moved to tier 1, and new students.
Verify Support Need

How do we verify need for individual student?

The teacher confirmation problem: default to a well-intentioned but ill-defined judgement call
Scenario 1:

What they are saying:

“This is actually a really good score for this student”

What being said implicitly

“We have lower expectations for this student”

What’s being done

A student who needs supports is not getting it
Scenario 2:

➢ What they are saying:

“It’s not a reading problem, this kid has [insert adverse life event] going on”

➢ What being said implicitly

“Because reading skill isn’t the root of the problem, we don’t need to worry about it”

➢ What’s being done

A student in a stressful life situation ALSO can’t read and they aren’t going to get support for it
Who is getting supported?

**CALCULATION METHODOLOGY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students with Plans</th>
<th>Students who Need a Plan</th>
<th>?</th>
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Caucasian Students: + 4.6%

African American Students: - 3.3%

4 Districts with support discrepancy of over 20%
Remedy:

Be critical and concrete about what additional data you are using

Think through your decision making and question potential implicit bias

Talk through the decision with the problem-solving team
Equitable Screening and Tier Placement

- Good screening assessment 3x a year
- Use consistent “cut scores”
- Clear plan and expectations for verify tier placement
  - Look at current and past data (don’t triangulate)
  - Don’t exclude for external factors -- address them
  - Be critical of your other data and decision making
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Thank you!