

2023 State of MTSS Report

Opportunities, Challenges, and Implementation Advice

PANORAMA EDUCATION



About This Report

In 2019, Panorama Education ran our first survey on the State of MTSS in education. The survey results showed that most districts were just getting started with their MTSS and facing significant challenges to implementation. Four years later, our 2023 survey asked many of the same questions to discover how diverse districts now approach providing tiered supports.

Results
The results presented in this report include insights into what educators see as the biggest challenges and opportunities of MTSS today, as well as their advice on MTSS leadership. They show ways in which MTSS implementation has evolved, including that more educators perceive MTSS implementation is farther along, and more districts report including students' life skills in their MTSS approaches.

It's also apparent that many challenges remain to be resolved. These include a need for robust decision-support data systems because many districts still rely on spreadsheets and data scattered across multiple systems, which makes it challenging to ensure all students and educators receive the supports they need.

Methods
We sent the survey to our email newsletter list, and received responses from over 400 educators in 2019 and over 600 educators in 2023. In both 2019 and 2023 teachers made up the largest group at around a third of respondents, followed by counselors, then district administrators, then principals and assistant principals, with superintendents and assistant superintendents making up the smallest portions. We compared 2023 results to 2019 results.

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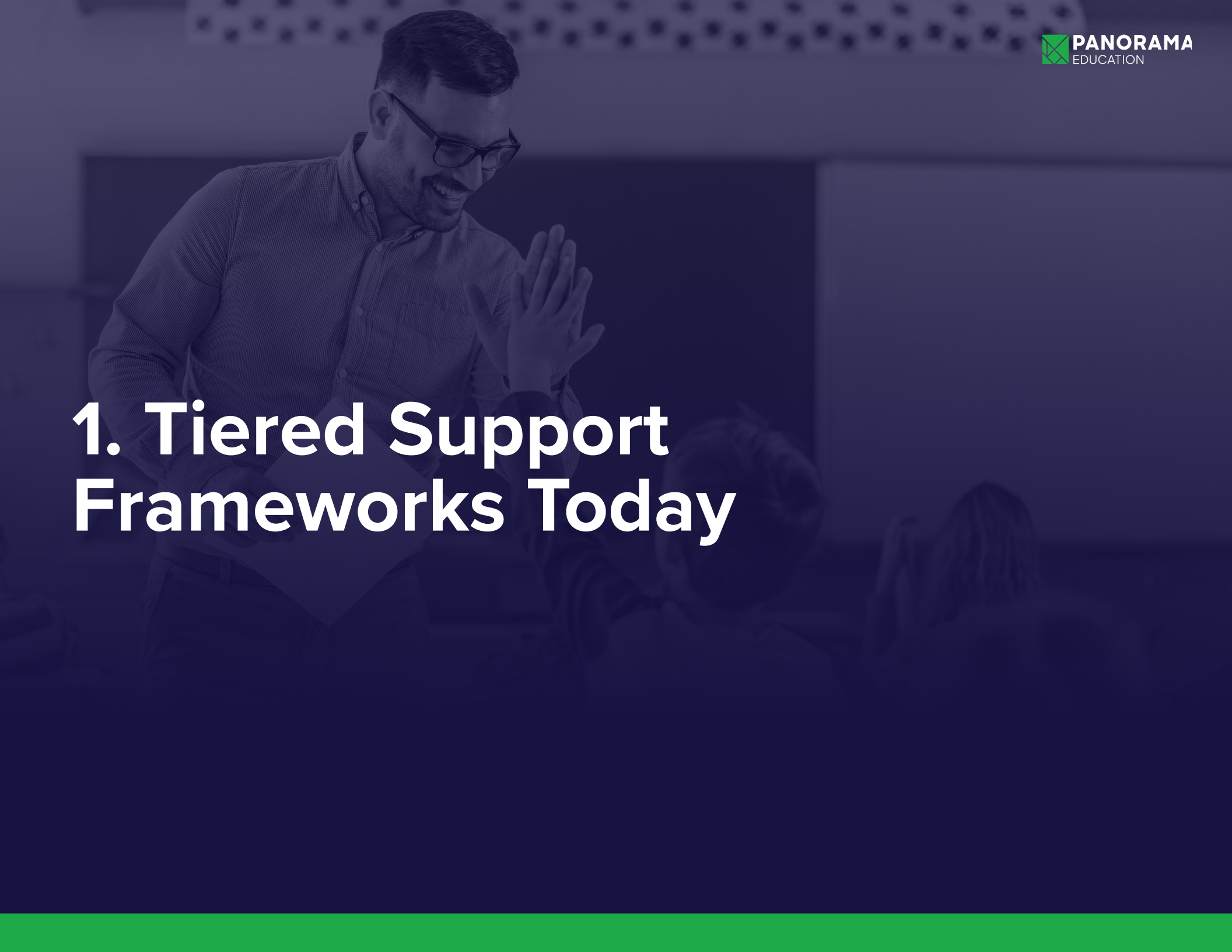


1. Tiered Support Frameworks Today

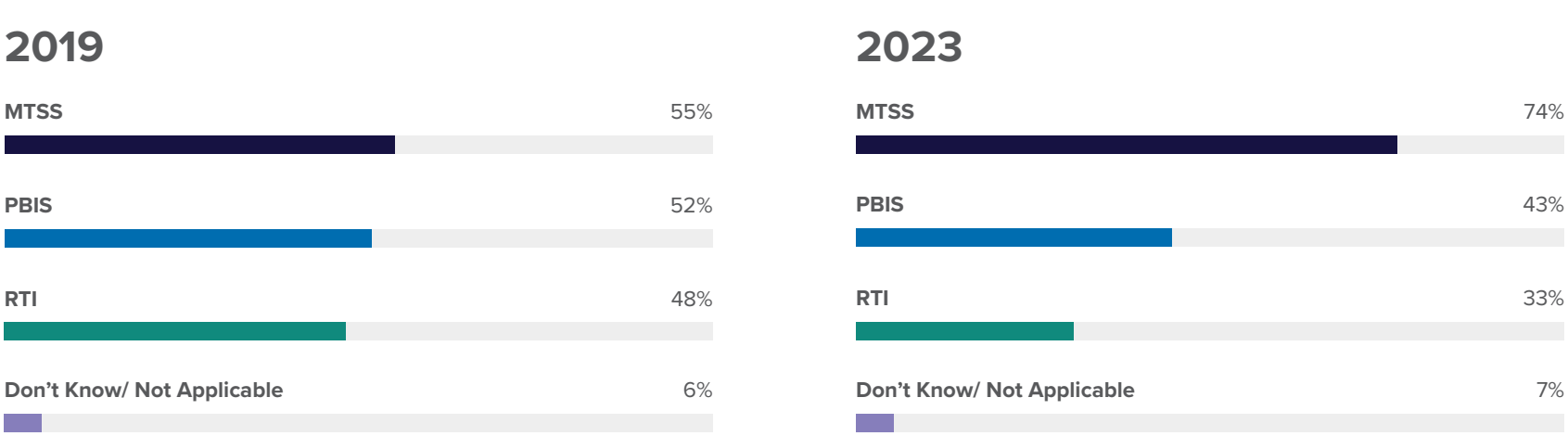
Today, more districts than ever are focused on MTSS as a system for providing tiered supports.

MTSS is what most districts labeled their tiered support framework, just as it was in 2019. However, unlike in 2019, MTSS now significantly surpasses all other systems.

Notably, RTI was reported in use by 48% of districts in 2019, but only 32% of districts reported labeling their supports this way in our 2023 survey.



Which student support framework does your school/district primarily use?



Participants selected all responses that applied.

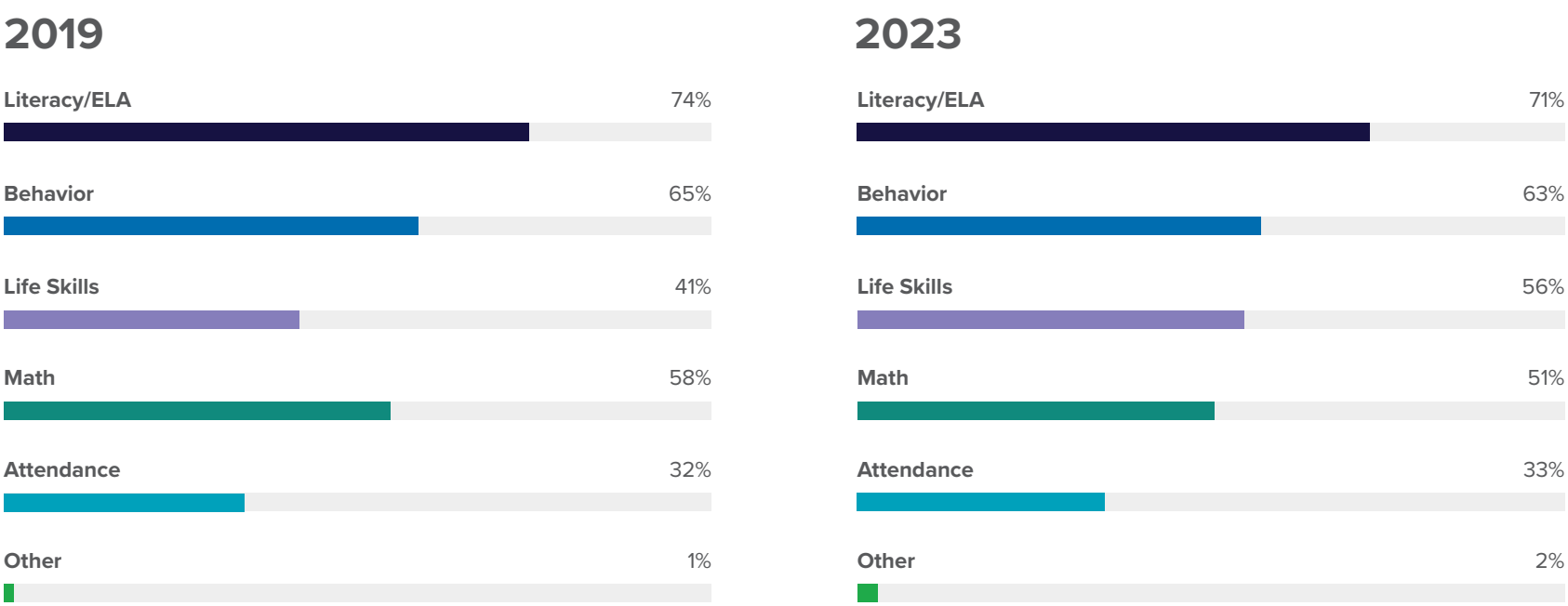
Literacy remains a top priority for interventions.

In terms of areas where interventions were focused, literacy and ELA topped the list in 2019 and remain there in 2023.

In 2019 we predicted that focus on life skills may be growing. Four years later it has in fact grown by 15 percentage points, even surpassing math as an area of intervention focus.



On which areas do you primarily focus your interventions today?

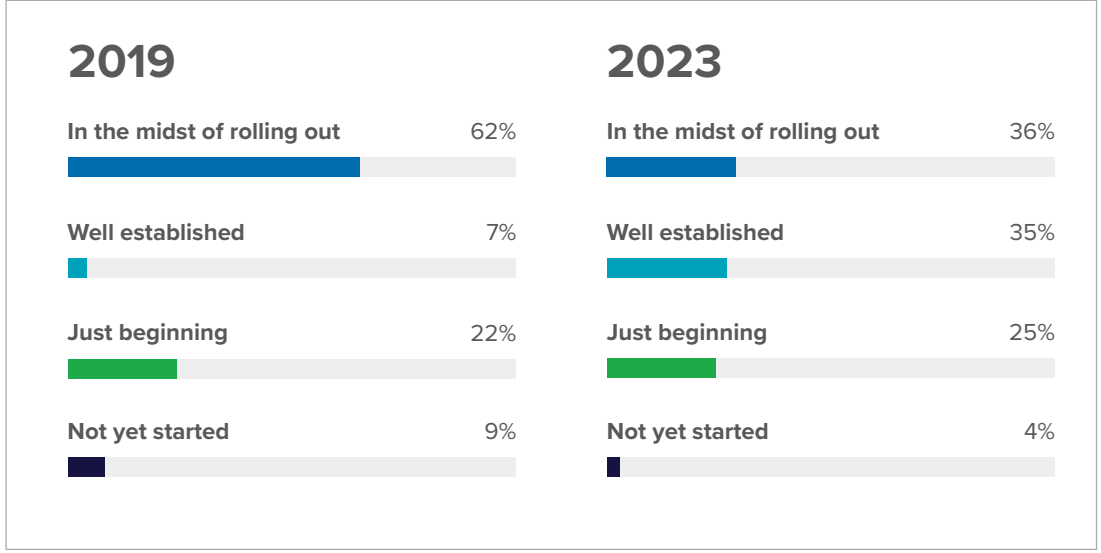


Participants selected all responses that applied.

In 2023 more schools and districts are well on their way to full implementation of MTSS.

Many more educators report being well established in their MTSS process with 35% in 2023 compared to only 7% in 2019. However, 29% percent say they are just beginning or not yet started in 2023—down only 2 percentage points from 2019.

How far along would you say your school or district is in terms of implementing your primary student support framework (MTSS/RTI/PBIS/etc.)?





More districts are moving away from spreadsheets for data-based decision-making, but many still rely on them.

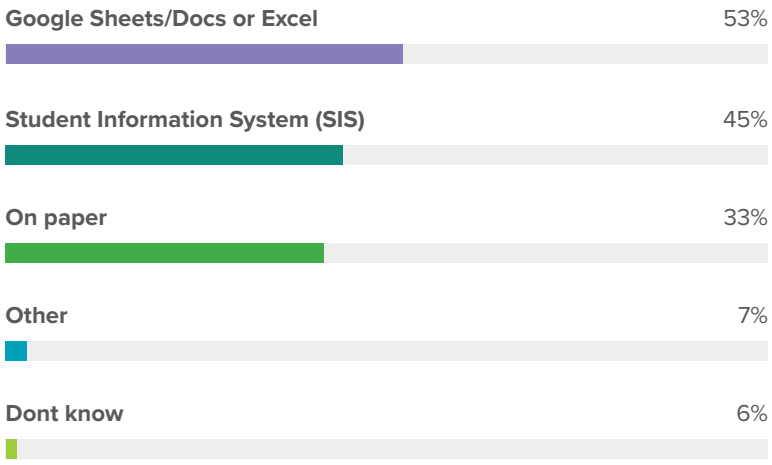
For their decision-support data systems, 44% of districts still rely on spreadsheets, down from 53% in 2019.

Meanwhile 43% of districts track data across multiple systems, and only 13% reported using dedicated software for tiered support data. This can make it difficult to use universal screening data to identify students who may need support, make timely decisions when planning and monitoring implementation of tiered interventions, and understand trends at the district level.

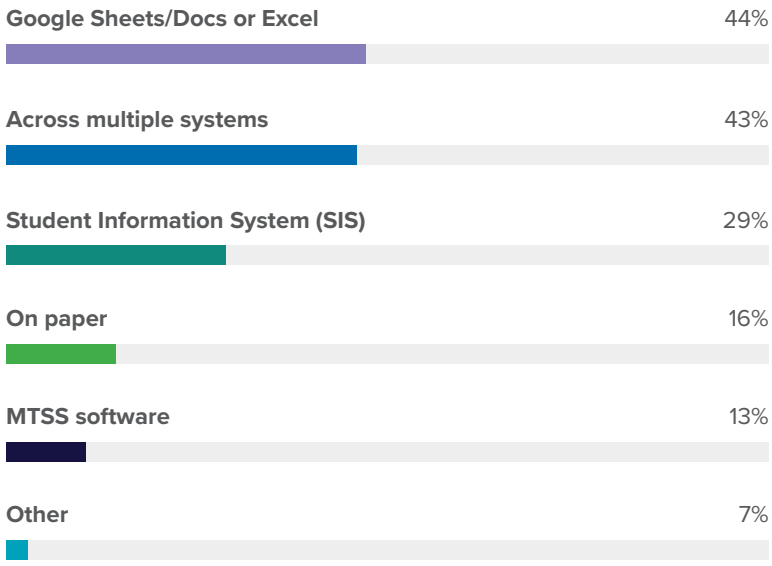


Where does your school or district primarily track tiered support data today?

2019



2023



Participants selected all responses that applied.



2. Opportunities and Challenges of MTSS

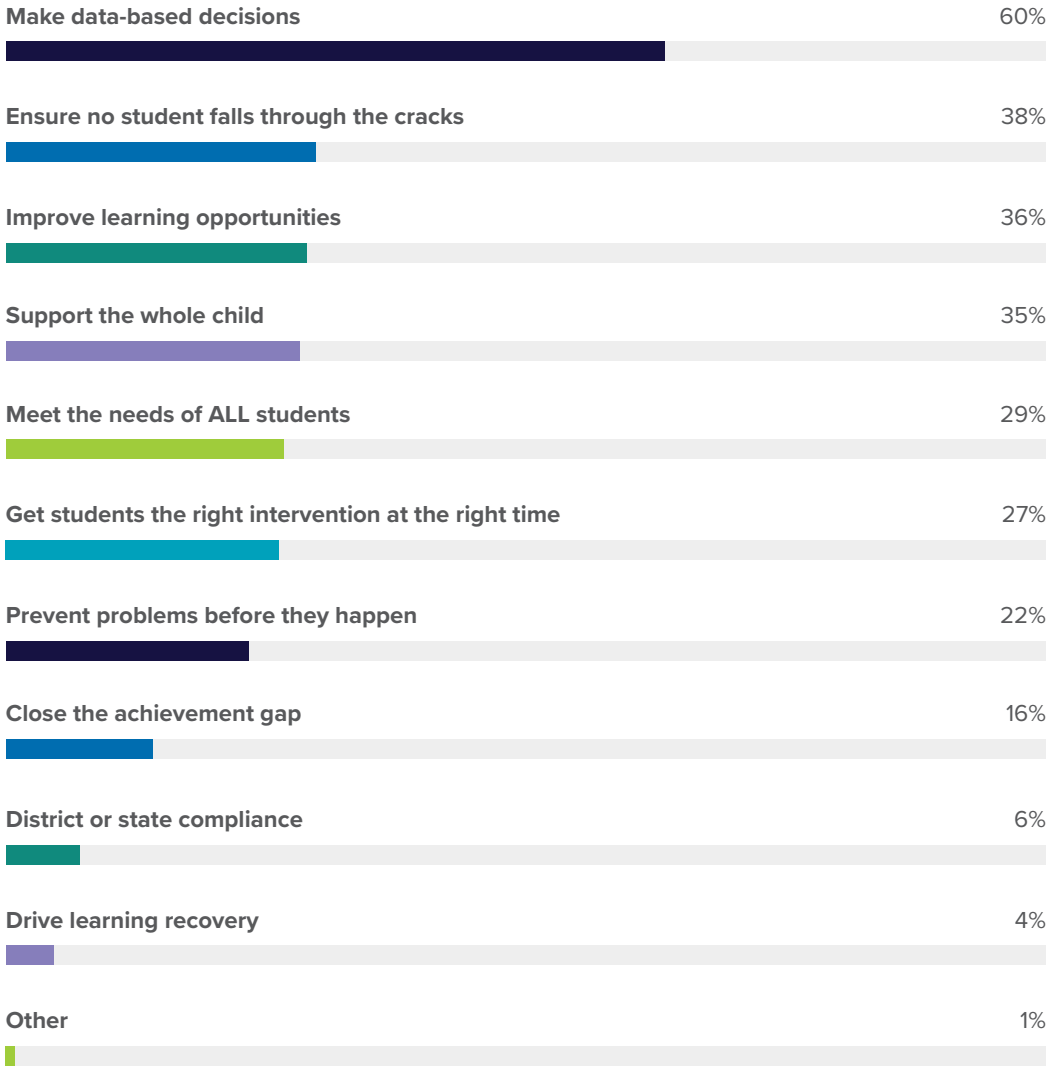
Educators see the ability to make data-based decisions as the biggest advantage of implementing MTSS.

Making data-based decisions was the clear leader among benefits educators identified for tiered supports systems.

Neck-and-neck behind that were the benefits of ensuring no student falls through the cracks, improving learning opportunities, and providing support for the whole child.



From your perspective, what are the biggest benefits you see in implementing MTSS or RTI strategies?



* Participants selected their top 3. The 2019 survey asked open-ended questions about opportunities. The 2023 survey used those results to provide a list from which educators could choose their top three.

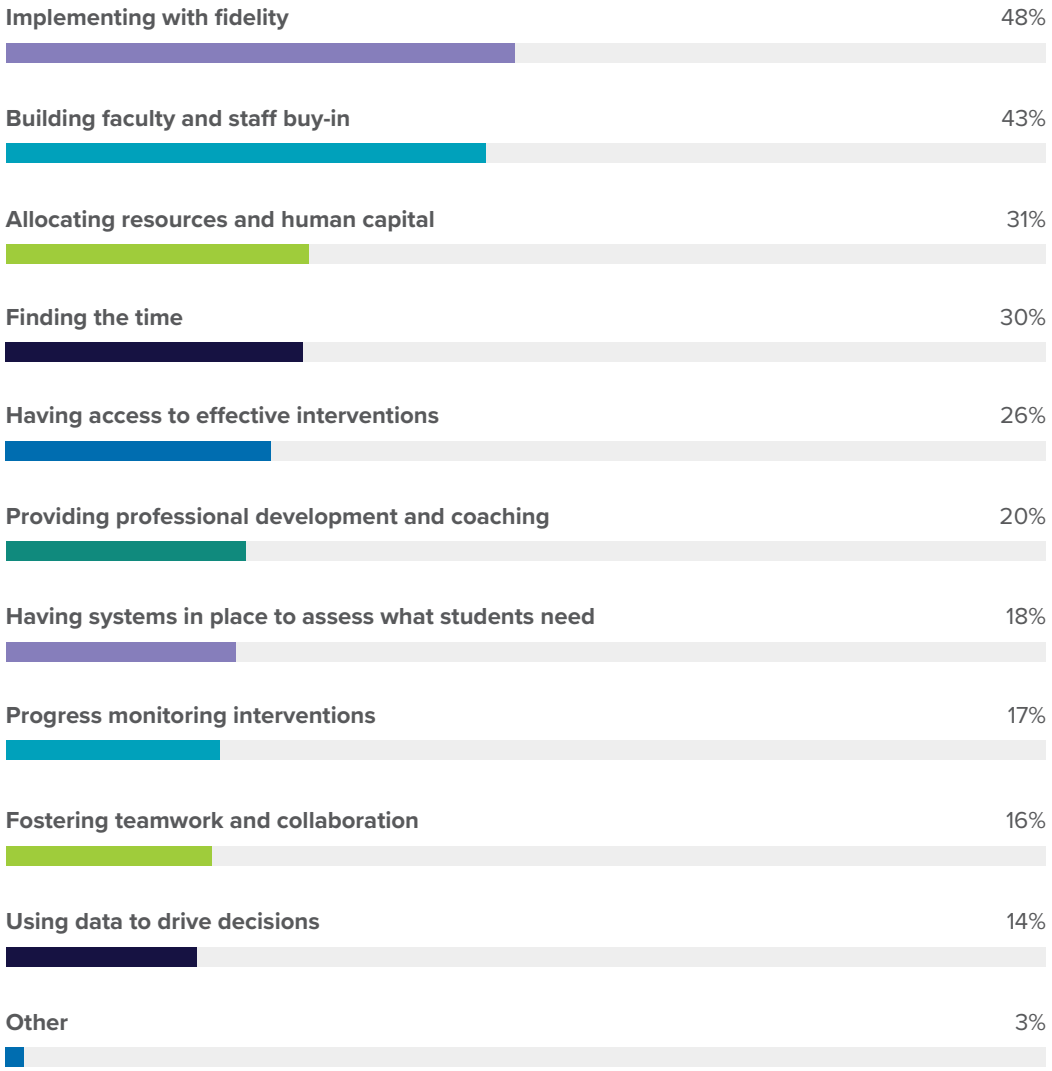
Coordinating human systems is the biggest challenge for MTSS leaders in 2023.

Among challenges to implementing MTSS, implementing with fidelity was most frequently selected, followed closely by building faculty and staff buy-in.

Directly behind those challenges were having the resources for implementation, including human capital, time, and access to a library of evidence-based interventions.



From your perspective, what are the biggest challenges in implementing MTSS or RTI strategies?



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3. Advice for MTSS Leaders

What is your top piece of advice for individuals who will lead MTSS work in their communities?

Over 500 of the educators who took our survey took the time to write in their advice for individuals who will lead MTSS work in their districts.

A few clear themes emerged from this advice—ranging from engaging stakeholders to providing professional development to looking at data.

1. Build alignment and buy-in

Many educators wrote about how important it is for all stakeholders to understand the district's MTSS vision and to see how it integrates with the work they're doing. Relevant parties include administrators, teachers, and specialists, as well as students and families. Effective MTSS truly requires everyone's buy-in. You have to change hearts to change minds.



— Hollis Baker,
District MTSS Coordinator, Mooresville Graded Schools, NC

"MTSS encompasses many of the best practices schools have been doing for years. However, many educators see MTSS as something 'additional.' My top piece of advice is to build systems that integrate the great work you are already doing in your building. Work with your district teams to find ways that MTSS can be integrated into their strategic goals. This helps with alignment and buy-in as everyone is working to build effective systems around the same goals."

"Build relationships first with all adult stakeholders."

– Stephanie Devis, *MTSS Liaison, Central Middle School, Riverside Unified School District, CA*

2. Support ongoing professional learning

MTSS implementation requires all teachers and staff to have the knowledge and skills to implement MTSS practices with fidelity. Provide professional development and ensure that everyone knows what's expected of them and has the resources to do it. Beyond initial training, educators need ongoing professional learning opportunities and coaching.



"Provide as much of the professional development before beginning MTSS to ensure that teachers and other staff have time to master the concepts."

– Kristin Shuck, *Special Education, West Park Elementary, Kansas City Public Schools, KS*



"Make sure you train everyone on the processes and forms. Expectations are very important."

– Beverly Browne, *Education Consultant, Anderson Creek Academy Charter School, NC*



3. Form strong teams

MTSS leadership teams within schools and district central offices form the backbone of the MTSS process. Build teams with diverse stakeholders, allocate time for team meetings, and establish clear team processes. You may need to hire staff for MTSS-specific roles.

"Schedule regular MTSS meetings to discuss and plan for student interventions/enrichments."

– Dr. Brenda McVicker, *Director of Curriculum and Assessment, Eastbrook Community Schools, IN*

"You can't do it alone! Build a multidisciplinary team from all levels, including district decision makers. Build a common language and speak the language in all areas related to student supports and services. Think sustainability—you have to go slow to go far."

– Lezya Weglarz, *MTSS Coordinator, San Marcos Unified School District, CA*

"Communicate. We have a small team who meets weekly and then we roll things out to teachers, but we have to communicate effectively to all of our teachers about what we are doing, so we get follow through from them as well!"

– Marissa Briley, *SEL Liaison, Glenwood Community Schools, West Elementary, IA*



4. Collect and review data

Develop a plan and implement systems to systematically collect and review data—including intervention implementation and progress monitoring—to inform MTSS decision-making. Give MTSS teams easy access to whole child data.



"Look into the power of Panorama's Student Success platform to view the child 'holistically' and save time with data in one space."

– Lisa Lequia, *Director of Student Services, Racine Unified School District, WI*

"Documentation is the most crucial part of the MTSS process so you can see the child's growth over time and make adjustments when needed."

– Allyson Queen, *MTSS Interventionist, Hiwassee Dam Elementary & Middle School, NC*

"Make sure you document interventions with fidelity and progress monitor."

– Alma Lomeli, *MTSS Specialist, Monte Vista Middle School, CA*



5. Provide an intervention library

When the data review process identifies students in need of supports, MTSS teams can quickly provide those supports if they have access to a library of high-quality research-backed interventions.

The foundation for MTSS is universal programming and Tier 1 supports, which when implemented well, should minimize the need for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions.

"Make interventions available to all students, and provide targeted interventions for those who need it."

- Kayla Livingston, *Behavioral/Mental Health Liaison, Greenwood School District 50, SC*



– Dr. Mindi Outlaw Collins, *MTSS Facilitator, Nash Central High School, NC*

"It is critically important to have a written plan with specific details, including thresholds/cutoffs, evidence-based interventions, and timelines. This takes the subjectivity out of a school's MTSS plan and transforms it into an objective framework.

While the plan is a living document, it is a point of reference for discussion and questions. Additionally, it allows for uniformity in implementation. This has been the most impactful piece of the puzzle in my journey as an MTSS facilitator."



6. Give it time

To effectively implement MTSS, educators need to devote time. This means building time into the schedule for MTSS team meetings, professional development, and delivery of interventions. It also means that MTSS adoption and success will not happen overnight. Many educators wrote in with encouragement to "be patient."



"Go slow to go fast. It will take time to see a change. Do not expect things to change in one year. It is a 3-5 year process."

– Danielle Aliano, *MTSS/RTI Coordinator, Southwest ISD, TX*

"Remember, this is not a one-year implementation. The system will take several years to truly develop. A tracking system and framework are key to success. Start with Tier 1 and live in it until solid."

– Stephanie Salazar, *Assistant Principal, Fife Elementary, WA*

"Think big but start small. It takes approximately three years to establish a true framework and to see the fruits of your labor."

– Laura Baker, *Director of Student Services, Bastrop ISD, TX*

7. Stay focused on students' needs

Above all else, stay focused on students' needs and monitor the impact of interventions. Bring in all forms of knowledge to understand the whole child—including test scores, behavior incidents, teacher perceptions, and student and family voice. Remember that MTSS is a system that's designed to give students the support they need.



"The most effective MTSS models consider the whole child, provide strong universal supports, and mobilize data and human 'systems' to meet the needs of all students."

– Joy C. Ellison, *Diverse Learning Intervention Specialist, LEARN 10 North Chicago, IL*

"You need to understand your students and the needs of the community to be able to create and implement an effective, accepted program."

– Janice Polley Augente, *Principal, Desert Rose High School, NV*



Bonus Advice: You got this!

In addition to the advice on tactical elements of implementing MTSS, many educators simply wrote words of encouragement. When MTSS implementation gets challenging, remember the words of fellow educators.

"Keep pushing and don't give up!"

"Remain committed."

"It's hard work, but it's worth it."

"Just get started somewhere—it will not be perfect, you will learn and adapt—but don't wait until you have it all figured out. Just jump in and start swimming for the sake of your students!"

"Don't give up if you are struggling. Try again and see what works best for your school/district."

"Keep going."

"Give it your best!"



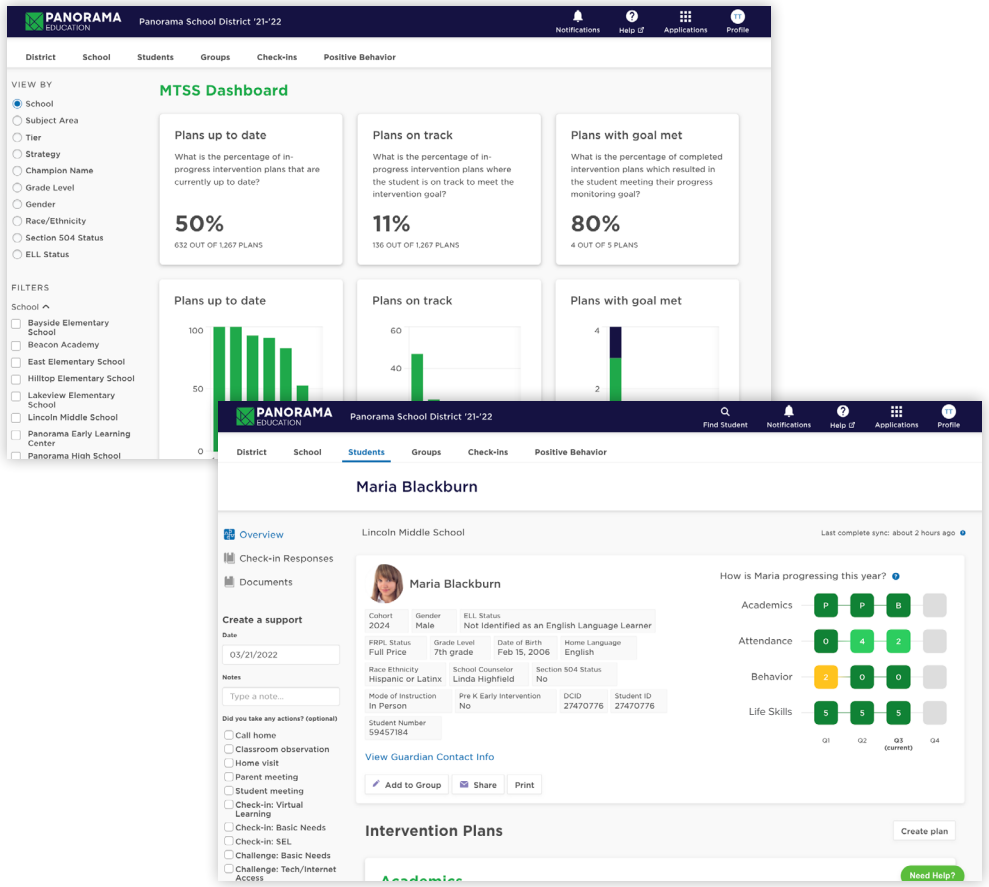
4. What's Next for Your MTSS

A unified MTSS platform

The results of this survey confirm that educators everywhere are working hard to get every student the support they need to succeed in school. MTSS implementation has evolved over the past four years, with more educators perceiving implementation is further along, and more districts including students' life skills in MTSS approaches.

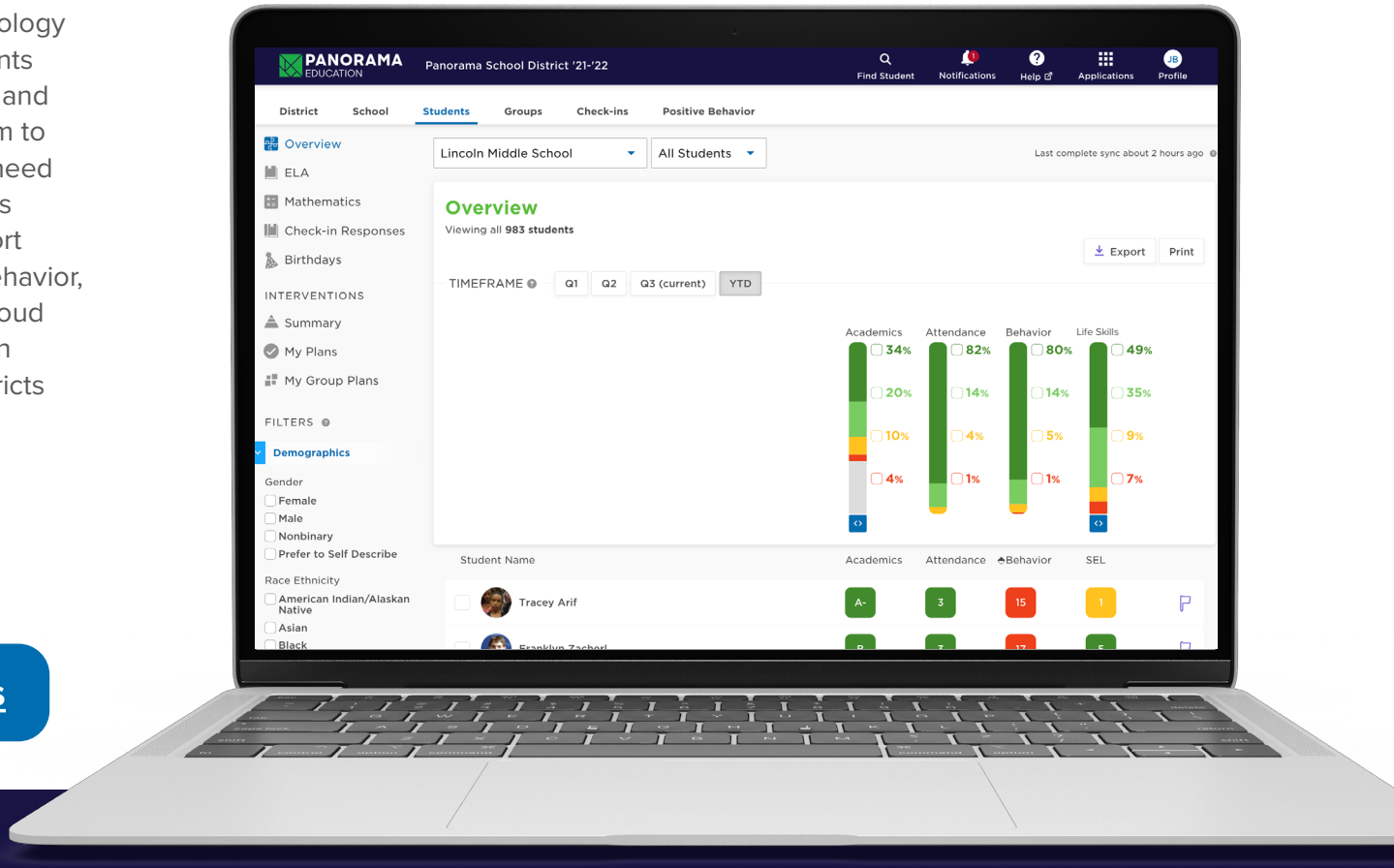
However, MTSS leaders still have a lot of challenges ahead of them. Many districts wrestle with making meaningful interpretations of data across multiple tracking systems, accessing research-backed interventions, and implementing with fidelity.

Panorama Student Sucess can help. The Panorama platform gives you all of your data in one place, with tools to plan and track interventions, including access to Panorama's Playbook of research- and evidence-based strategies. So your team has quicker access to better data and can focus more on delivering the education and supports that students need.



About Panorama Education

Panorama Education is an education technology company founded in 2012 that helps students achieve academic success and well-being, and gives schools and school districts a platform to hear what families, students and teachers need in the classroom. Educators use Panorama's software platform to understand and support students across academics, attendance, behavior, and life skills development. Panorama is proud that its platform is used to support 15 million students in 25,000 schools and 2,000 districts across the United States.



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