MTSS Implementation Guide

Getting Started with MTSS

Successfully launching a new initiative requires a well-structured plan that aligns stakeholders and sets the foundation for lasting success. This guide supports educational leaders through each phase of MTSS implementation, offering key strategies, practical tools, and essential insights. By breaking the process into manageable steps, it empowers school teams to clarify roles, build capacity, and drive strategic decisions—ensuring students receive the academic and behavioral support they need to thrive.

Understanding This Implementation Guide

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Getting Ready for MTSS

Navigating MTSS can be easier with a clear understanding of its key terms. This glossary provides concise, user-friendly definitions of essential MTSS terminology.

Glossary

Accommodations – Changes in how a student accesses learning without altering academic expectations (e.g., extended time on tests, preferential seating). Accommodations help students with disabilities or learning challenges engage in the curriculum on an equal basis with peers.

Bulk Tiering – The process of assigning groups of students to MTSS tiers based on broad assessment data or predefined criteria, rather than individual analysis. This method is typically used as an initial step before more detailed evaluations.

Comprehensive Assessment System – A coordinated set of assessments (e.g., universal screeners, formative and summative assessments, diagnostics) used to evaluate student progress, guide instruction, and inform decision-making at all MTSS levels.

Diagnostic Assessment – A targeted assessment used to identify specific skill gaps, learning needs, or underlying challenges. These assessments help educators design appropriate interventions for students.

Differentiation – The practice of adjusting instruction based on student readiness, learning preferences, and interests to ensure all students can access and engage with grade-level content effectively.

504 Plans – Legally required plans under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act that provide accommodations and supports to students with disabilities who do not qualify for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) but still need assistance to access learning.

Gap Analysis – A method of comparing student performance against expected benchmarks to determine learning gaps and instructional needs.

Baseline – The initial data collected on a student's academic or behavioral performance before an intervention begins. This data serves as a reference point for measuring progress.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP) – A legally binding document developed under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that outlines specialized instruction, accommodations, and services for students with disabilities.

Glossary

Intervention – Targeted support provided to students who need additional assistance beyond core instruction. Interventions vary in intensity based on student needs and MTSS tier placement.

Modification – A change in what a student is expected to learn or demonstrate, often used for students with disabilities who require significant adjustments to curriculum standards.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) – A framework that integrates academic, behavioral, and social-emotional support through a tiered approach to meet the needs of all students.

Progress Monitoring – The systematic collection and analysis of student performance data over time to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and adjust instruction as needed.

Response to Intervention (RTI) – A component of MTSS that focuses specifically on academic interventions and progress monitoring to support struggling students before considering special education services.

Scaffolding – Instructional strategies that provide temporary support to students as they learn new concepts, gradually reducing assistance as they gain independence.

Special Education (SPED) – Specialized instructional programs and services designed to support students with disabilities who require individualized instruction to access learning.

Tier 1 - Core Instruction – High-quality, research-based instruction delivered to all students in the general education classroom, designed to meet the needs of most learners.

Tier 2 - Targeted Supplemental Interventions – Additional support provided to students who need more assistance than core instruction alone can provide. These interventions are typically delivered in small groups.

Tier 3 - Intensive Interventions and Supports – Highly individualized interventions for students with significant learning or behavioral needs, often provided in one-on-one or very small group settings.

Universal Screening – School-wide assessments conducted multiple times a year to identify students who may need additional support in academics, behavior, or social-emotional learning.

Implementation Process

A well-structured Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) strengthens school culture, enhances instruction, and ensures timely, data-driven interventions. However, building an effective MTSS framework takes time, intentional planning, and phased implementation.

Implementation will vary based on local resources and models.
Spending time identifying the use case of MTSS for the school district will narrow the scope of the MTSS framework. MTSS can be used for identifying and progress monitoring an array of strategies like academic, social-emotional, chronically absent, behavioral, and multilingual.

The Phases of MTSS

Plan & Prepare

01.

In the planning phase, your team lays the groundwork for MTSS. This means assessing needs, setting priorities, mapping out a vision, and choosing the right tools—like valid assessments and proven interventions. You'll also build your implementation plan and ensure staff are trained and ready. The goal? Buy-in, clear direction, and a strong foundation. The tools below will help you get there.

02.

Implement, Monitor, Improve

Now it's time to put your plan into action. Success hinges on consistent implementation—so keep an eye on fidelity, troubleshoot barriers as they come up, and meet regularly to problem-solve. Professional learning shifts toward using data well, boosting instructional quality.

03.

Sustain & Build

Teams shift into continuous improvement mode—refining MTSS to meet changing needs, align with other initiatives, and stay strong through staff turnover. Regular data reviews and stakeholder input help keep momentum going. The goal: a system that lasts and adapts.

Laying the Foundation: Establishing Your MTSS Framework

MTSS takes a whole-child approach, addressing academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs through a structured, tiered support system.

As a district-wide initiative, MTSS enhances student outcomes by incorporating universal screeners, tiered interventions, ongoing progress monitoring, and data-driven decision-making.

Since it operates at the system level, MTSS requires collaboration among all stakeholders—ensuring that decisions are informed by data and that every student receives the appropriate level of support.

MTSS Framework Worksheet

Collaborative Problem Solving and Teaming

Team	Purpose	Meeting	Frequency	Decision-Making Process	Topic's Members
District					
Building					
Grade-Level					
Student					

Communication Plan:
1. Who will be the person/people creating and maintaining the intervention sets? For the first year, this person/team of up to 3 people will be the primary contact.
2. How will team members communicate with each other?
3. How many interventionists are in your district, and what do they cover?

MTSS Framework Worksheet

Assessment System Analysis

List by grade level(s) each assessment used under its purpose.

Screening	Diagnostic	Progress Monitoring	Outcome Evaluation

Things to consider:

1. Will you need historical data uploaded into a Data Management System?
2. Will you be tiering students based on a specific assessment or pulling data from multiple sources? Multiple data points are recommended.
3. Do you have high-dosage tutoring?
4. What curriculum and progress monitoring do they use?

MTSS Framework Worksheet
Tiered Systems of Instruction

Tier 1	In Place	Not Yet In Place
All students participate in Tier 1 differentiated core instruction rooted in assessment data		
A comprehensive, cohesive, curriculum program is available for Tier 1 at all grade levels		
The Tier 1 core instruction/program has been evaluated against the assessment data points		
Differentiated instruction is provided during Tier 1 instruction, with whole-group and small-group formats		
Adherence to the planned Tier 1 instruction is monitored by teachers and/or administrators		
Tier 1 instruction is planned by the grade level team, using universal screening data in the collaborative problem-solving process		

Tier 2	In Place	Not Yet In Place
All staff understand the purpose of Tier 2 strategic instruction is to catch students up to grade level expectations.		
The schedule includes 30-45 minutes of Tier 2 instruction focused on the strategy		
The Tier 2 strategic intervention instruction/program has a prescribed curriculum		
The Tier 2 strategic intervention instruction is more explicit, systematic and supportive than Tier 1 reading instruction		
Adherence to the planned Tier 2 instruction is monitored by teachers and/or administrators		
Student progress is monitored more frequently for students who receive Tier 2 strategic instruction		
Tier 2 strategic intervention instruction is planned by the grade level team using universal screening and diagnostic data in the collaborative problem-solving process		

Tier 3	In Place	Not Yet In Place
All staff understand the purpose of Tier 3 intensive instruction is to catch students up to grade level expectations		
The schedule includes 45-60 minutes of Tier 3 instruction focused on the strategy		
The Tier 3 intensive intervention/program has a prescribed curriculum		
The Tier 3 intensive intervention is more explicit, systematic, supportive and individualized than Tier 2		
Adherence to the planned Tier 3 instruction is monitored by teachers and/or administrators		
Student progress is monitored more frequently for students receiving Tier 3 intensive instruction		
Tier 3 intensive intervention instruction is planned by student teams using universal screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring data in the collaborative problem-solving process		

Forming Your MTSS Team

A well-structured MTSS team is essential for driving implementation and problem-solving within the system.

A team should consist of district-level and school-level representatives for overseeing implementation and monitoring student progress with consistency across schools.

Tip: start with a smaller district team during your pilot phase.

Suggested Team Members:

- District MTSS/C&I rep

- Campus MTSS rep

- Principal and/or AP

- Teacher/interventionists (Elem/Sec)

- Special programs

- Behavior/ SEL lead

- Technology rep

- Testing/data/reporting rep

- Funding rep- decision maker

- Student services

Maintaining Fidelity and Monitoring Progress

To ensure the success of your MTSS framework, it's essential to establish a structured plan for ongoing evaluation and staff support. Key steps include:

01. Administer Universal Screeners

Conduct the first round of screening for all students using a reliable, research-based assessment.

02. Use Screening Data to Inform Tiered Support

Assign students to appropriate MTSS tiers based on screening results and allocate necessary interventions and resources.

03. Provide Targeted Support

Analyze staff feedback to identify challenges and create a plan to offer additional guidance or professional development where needed.

04. Monitor Fidelity of Implementation

Track intervention effectiveness, task completion, core instruction practices, and MTSS meeting adherence to ensure consistency.
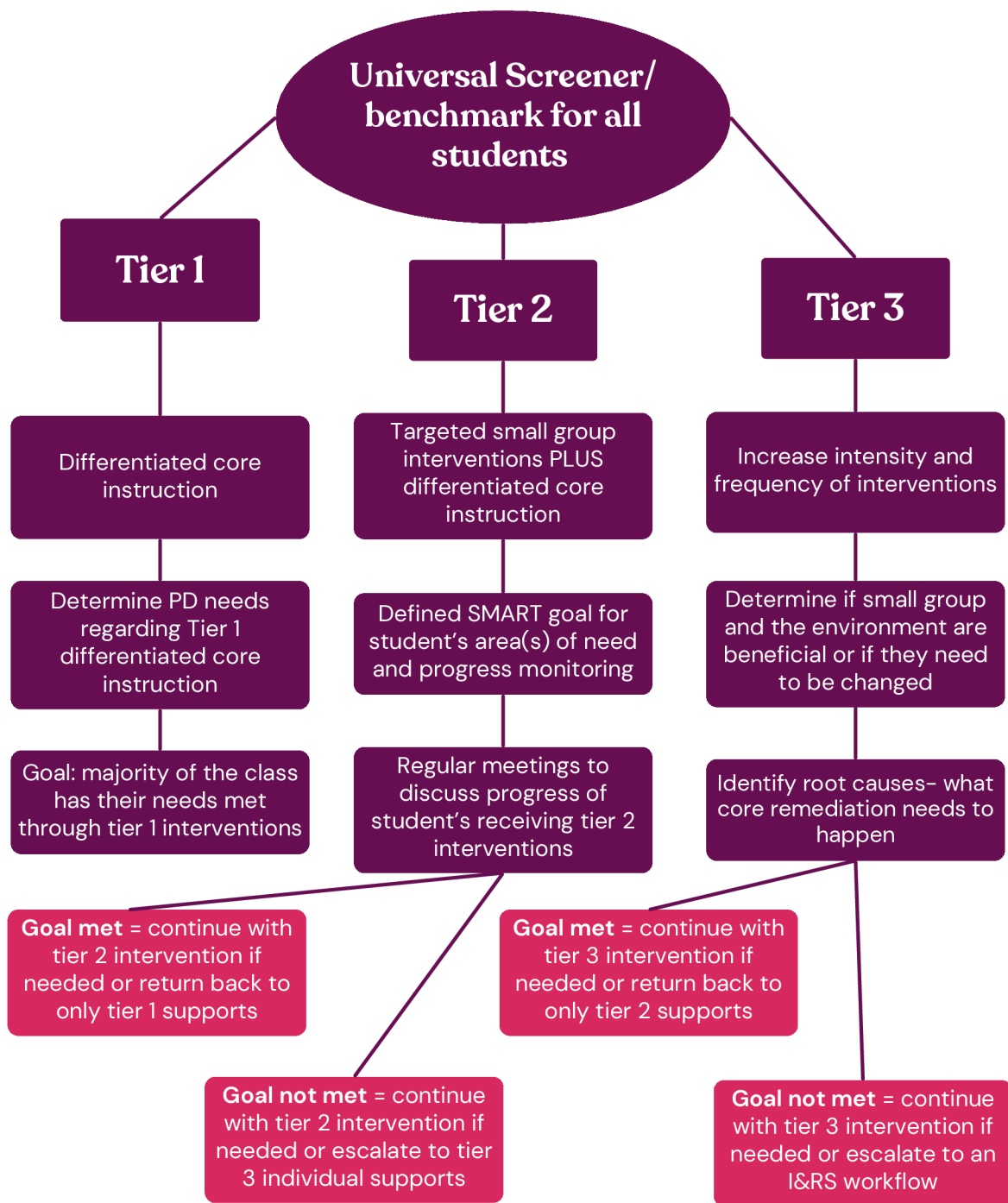
05. Oversee Intervention Plans & Progress Monitoring

Ensure that intervention plans are created, sessions are completed as scheduled, and MTSS teams are actively using progress monitoring data to drive decision-making.

06. Schedule Regular Staff Check-Ins

Conduct frequent surveys or questionnaires to gather feedback on MTSS meetings, protocols, and overall implementation.

MTSS Road Map: Flow Chart

Universal Screener/ benchmark for all students

Tier 1

Differentiated core instruction

Determine PD needs regarding Tier 1 differentiated core instruction

Goal: majority of the class has their needs met through tier 1 interventions

Tier 2

Targeted small group interventions PLUS differentiated core instruction

Defined SMART goal for student's area(s) of need and progress monitoring

Regular meetings to discuss progress of student's receiving tier 2 interventions

Tier 3

Increase intensity and frequency of interventions

Determine if small group and the environment are beneficial or if they need to be changed

Identify root causes– what core remediation needs to happen

Goal met = continue with tier 2 intervention if needed or return back to only tier 1 supports

Goal met = continue with tier 3 intervention if needed or return back to only tier 2 supports

Goal not met = continue with tier 2 intervention if needed or escalate to tier 3 individual supports

Goal not met = continue with tier 3 intervention if needed or escalate to an I&RS workflow

ACTION ITEM	POINT PEOPLE
Universal Screener Review– conduct in regular intervals to assess students' progress (academic, SEL, and behavioral)	School team– grade–level teams, interventionists, and admin
Identifying Tiers 2 and 3– based on screener results, determine the students in need of targeted interventions	Interventionists (I&RS team)
Online Progress Monitoring– for tiers 2 and 3	Teachers and interventionists

Collecting Data and Assessing Progress

To sustain MTSS success, education leaders should continuously assess staff understanding, system effectiveness, and student growth. This process involves several key actions:

- Universal Screeners and Progress Monitoring
- Strategic Mid-Year Reviews: Use mid-year data trends to adjust intervention plans, reinforce best practices, and strengthen core instruction.
- School and District Level Data Discussions: Analyze assessment outcomes, intervention effectiveness, behavioral trends, social-emotional learning (SEL) metrics, and attendance data to refine action plans.

Phased Implementation: Start Small to Scale MTSS Effectively

Establishing a successful MTSS program happens over a multi-year period. Implementation will happen in phases to ensure a successful program is established that meets the district's need.

It is recommended to identify a group of students that would benefit greatly from strategic support and consistent progress monitoring. This will allow the MTSS framework to be developed while also showing proof of concept before expanding to the entire school district.

Examples of phase one groups identified by school districts:

- Multilingual students in K-2
- Math students in grades 7 and 8
- Students identified as Tier 3 in the universal screener in the elementary school
- Students identified as Tier 3 in the universal screener in the 7th or 8th grade
- Chronically absent students who have exceeded or about to exceed the number of absences allowed.

It is recommended that phase one expands the full school year to allow time for change to the progress monitoring system and the MTSS framework as a whole. At the end of the school year, an expansion to the next phase will occur to identify the target group for phase 2.

Resource Allocation

Successful MTSS implementation requires ensuring that educators have timely access to the tools and resources they need. Before launching or refining your MTSS framework, it's essential to secure the necessary supports to create a seamless, data-driven system.

01. Professional Development and Trainings

- Professional Learning – Provide ongoing training to strengthen foundational MTSS knowledge and ensure all stakeholders understand their roles.
- Infrastructure for Support – Create dedicated spaces for intervention sessions and establish structured meeting times for MTSS teams.
- Evidence-Based Instructional Strategies – Equip educators with research-supported intervention techniques and differentiated instruction methods.

02. Comprehensive MTSS Management System

- OnCourse MTSS streamlines data collection, tracks interventions, analyzes student progress, and drives informed decision-making.
- Administering Reliable Assessments or using Multiple Measures as a universal screener– Utilize valid and research-backed screeners and progress monitoring tools to track student growth effectively.
- Data-Driven Supports – Ensure enrichment opportunities, targeted interventions, and instructional resources are in place to meet diverse student needs.
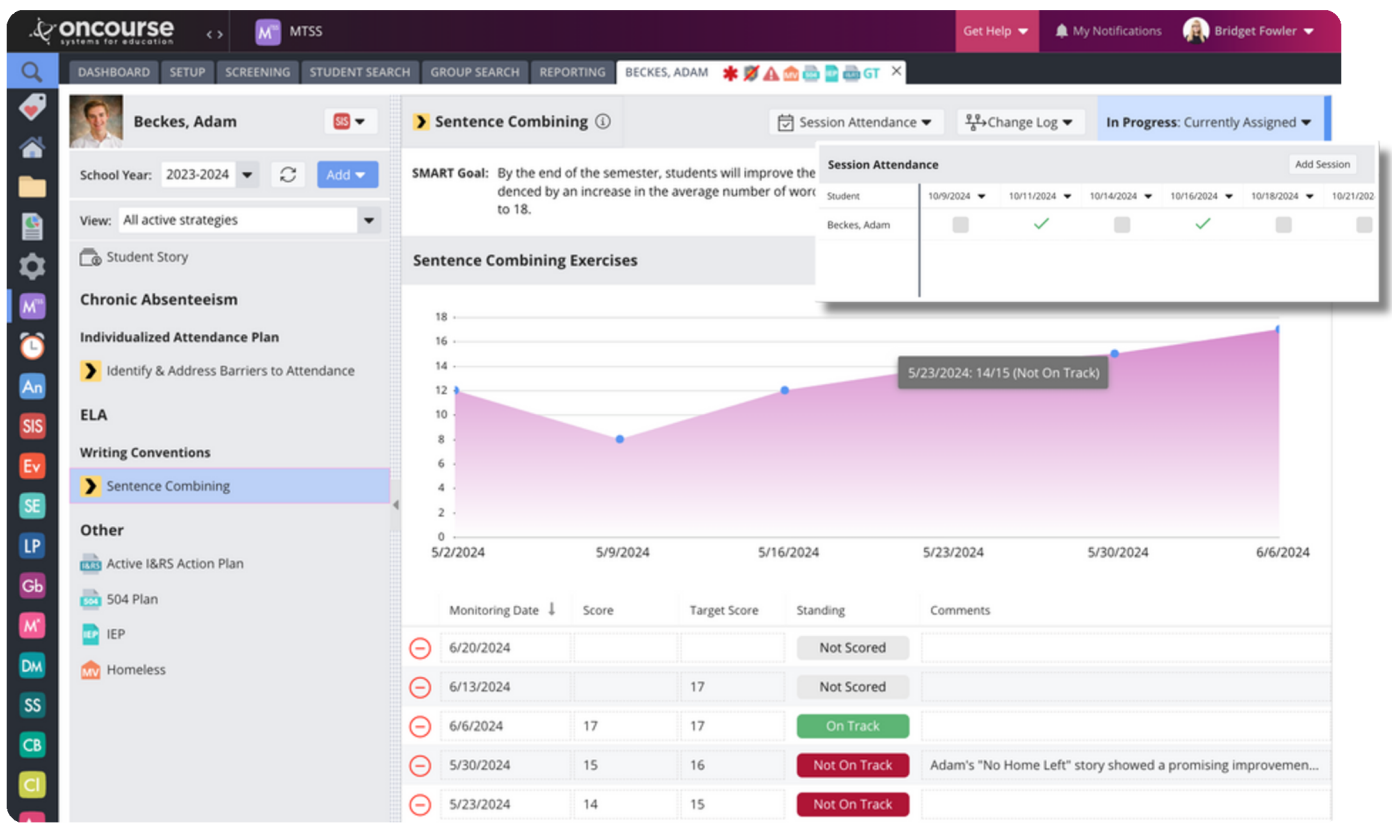
Moving forward with OnCourse MTSS

- Assemble your MTSS team
- As a team, complete the above worksheets
- As a team, identify the strategic group you'd like to start with
- Select up to 3 members from the MTSS team to control the setup of interventions, strategies, and training for the larger MTSS team within OnCourse.

An OnCourse representative will work with them to discuss the strategic group you selected and the next steps in setup.

This representative will work with your interventionists to use the platform and check-in frequently for support.

Additional Offerings

✓ Creating your Universal Screener as a Multiple Measures report.

✓ Uploading your historical or current data for the screener to populate.

✓ Creating Multiple Measures reports and respective Data Manager templates for Progress Monitoring.

✓ Rollover of the Universal Screener and/or Progress Monitoring Multiple Measures reports for the following school year.
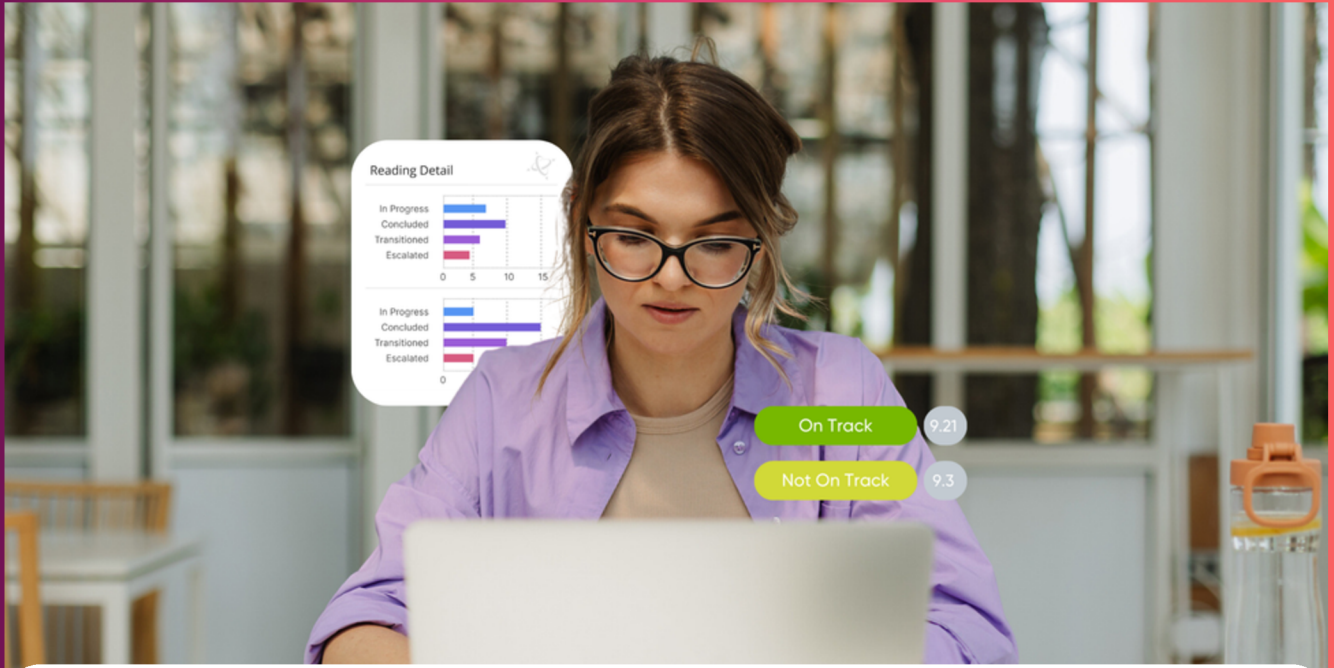
Ready to get started with OnCourse MTSS?

If you've got a clear vision and are eager to kickstart your project, let's dive in!

Rebecca Fisher
Ed-tech Specialist

As an experienced educator, Rebecca can help uplift your MTSS and RTI processes.

Send any questions you have at:

rfisher@oncoursesystems.com

Schedule a 15-minute meeting with Rebecca!