



Branching Minds

Product Survey Memo

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Introduction

Branching Minds is a software tool for teachers, enabling the use of research-based best practices to efficiently and effectively improve outcomes for at-risk students. The Branching Minds tool was created to transform school intervention meetings with personalized supports, collaboration tools, and easy to understand reporting. Branching Minds also allows teachers to follow problem-solving best practices, create data-driven strategies, and improve student outcomes.

As a part of the NewSchools Venture Fund Ignite Special Education Challenge, Branching Minds and WestEd developed teacher survey and phone interview protocols to better understand how the Branching Minds software tool is implemented and received by teachers and to examine the impact of using Branching Minds on the meetings schools conduct to discuss students receiving interventions (i.e., student intervention or progress meetings). Specifically, the questions in the survey and interview are targeted to focus on the implementation, impact, and teacher reception of the Branching Minds product with the intent of using this research to further develop and refine the Branching Minds product.

The central research questions in this study included:

- 1. Does using Branching Minds improve the efficiency of intervention meetings?**
 - a. Do meeting attendees review student data prior to the meeting?
 - b. Do teachers come to meetings with an organized presentation of student data, including screening, description of challenges/skills, intervention use, and progress monitoring data?
 - c. Do meetings follow a structured, pre-arranged agenda?
- 2. Does using Branching Minds improve the quality of intervention meetings?**
 - a. Do attendees use the Branching Minds data to discuss students' needs and make a targeted plan for addressing those needs?
 - b. Do intervention meetings have a positive, problem-solving climate?
 - c. Do attendees leave meetings with a clear, documented plan for next steps?

In this memo, we describe the methods and procedure used to explore the research questions above. We present both quantitative and qualitative results from the survey conducted during the study, and conclude with suggestions for future development of the Branching Minds product.

*** Below is the memo summary. The full report is available, upon request.***

Summary

Both the product survey and phone interviews converged on the conclusion that educators exhibited positive impressions of the Branching Minds tool. A consistent finding in both examinations indicated that Branching Minds improved the efficiency and effectiveness of student progress meetings, and decreased the time teachers spent discussing individual student's progress. One or more educators from each participating site came to meetings having reviewed the student data prior to the meeting and presented organized and visual student progress data, resulting in more structured meetings and more positive, problem solving climates. Some of the specific findings in relation to the original research questions that focus on efficiency and effectiveness are discussed below.

Does using Branching Minds decrease the time teachers spend discussing individual student's progress during an intervention meeting?

Branching Minds is an efficient, child-centered, collaborative tool.

Participants reported that they believed the Branching Minds tool deepens teachers' understanding of students needs and provides data-driven feedback to guide interventions. Interview participants shared that Branching Minds is a collaborative and child-centered tool that helps busy, overburdened staff communicate efficiently. Ms. Jody shared:

"I like that Branching Minds is a child-centered tool. I like that it is designed to assist teachers to deepen their understanding of how their students may need help and how they may, in fact, help those students."

Branching Minds' visually displayed, data driven information increases efficiency through meeting focus.

Interview participants reported that because of the use of Branching Minds' visual representations, meetings were more focused and attendees could discuss more students in the same amount of time. Ms. Katie explained how the graphs made student progress "really obvious" and helped the meeting attendees "keep a closer eye on student progress". She also added:

“I think Branching Minds helps make the meetings easier because we just have more information, and the information in a user- friendly and organized way.”

Ms. Debbie shared that before Branching Minds, her team had the problem of "rushed meetings", and they did not have enough data, enough historical information, or enough time to discuss each student's progress in a complete and productive way. She also shared that, before Branching Minds, everything was written down on "various sheets of paper". She went on to say that Branching Minds enables meeting to be more focused and targeted:

“Now [with Branching Minds], you already have all of this data logged in. Now when you come together with a team of specialists, you really are looking specifically at the problem and creating a better crisis intervention, and a plan that's more focused and targeted.”

Branching Minds' auto-generated data summaries save time and increase productivity.

Interview participants reported that the Branching Minds graphs and visual representations helped participants decrease the time needed to prepare for meetings, and in some cases, enabled more productive meetings by giving teachers the opportunity to strategize problem-solving solutions before meetings begin. Ms. Katie stated:

“Due to Branching Minds, it has been easier to makes graphs for student data. In the past, I've had to make my own separate spreadsheet that had a graph on it to show parents [the student's] progress. So, [Branching Minds] has been really helpful.”

Does using Branching Minds improve the quality of the intervention meeting?

Branching Minds tool provides meeting structure to organize and guide student progress meetings.

Interview participants reported that the Branching Minds tool helped to guide student progress meetings, creating more structure during the session and allowing attendees to set goals and stay focused. Ms. Sally stated that, having the ability to pull up a graph during a meeting and visually see if students are meeting their goals not only helped to guide and focus their discussions, but also:

“Deepened their understanding of why the data is required, and how it informs intervention.”

The Branching Minds tool enables a holistic view of student behavior, providing potential for more constructive, positive meeting climates.

Interview participants have stated that the use of Branching Minds helped create a more positive and effective climate during meetings, and that Branching Minds helped meeting attendees see a "distinct story" when looking at each student. Branching Minds helped to break down student progress into smaller pieces, which makes the meeting process less overwhelming.

Clear understanding of student needs and progress.

Interview participants reported being able to leave meetings with a clear understanding of the students' needs, and the ability to monitor intervention progress and determine if students were receiving appropriate supports. One interview participants reported being able to use the Branching Minds tool to look specifically at student issues, see the amount of time each student was being served for RTI, determine if the interventions were being implemented with integrity, and enter a new intervention if necessary. Multiple interview participants noted that they were minimally able to look at the Branching Minds graphs, view the trend data, and conclude the nature of each student's progress.

Branching Minds product features: Insight survey and embedded professional development (PD).

Interview participants appreciated the ability to use Branching Minds to support teachers in their learning and growth as educators, and to gain support in areas where they are not as experienced. Interview participants felt that Branching Minds provided a structure and framework in which teachers can learn to solve issues in a more effective way and give educators new insight and understanding regarding the resources available to them. This insight can help current intervention students and supports the continued development of novice and experienced educators.