



Exploring the Alignment of Behavior Screening Policies and Practices in U.S. Schools



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INTRODUCTION

- Although a large number of children and adolescents meet the diagnostic criteria for mental health disorders, only a small fraction actually receive services (Burns et al., 1995; Center for Disease Control, 2004; Merikangas et al., 2010; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999).
- Strategies to increase receipt of evidence-based assessment, programs, and practices through providing mental health services in schools have been associated with improvements (Bradshaw, Buckley & Jalongo, 2008), yet gaps remain.
- Alignment of policy and practice, specifically around early identification and responsibility for prevention efforts, can facilitate understanding of the gap – yet little is known about the current landscape of State Departments of Education (SDEs) and directions from states to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) for early identification.

PURPOSE

- The purpose of this study was to explore the alignment of policies and practices around social, emotional, and behavioral (SEB) screening across SDEs and LEAs by comparing data from several studies that are part of an IES-funded project, NEEDS². The goals of this study were to:
 - Describe state- and district-level policies related to SEB screening.
 - Compare the alignment of school district reported practices and state policies around SEB screening.

METHODS

Policy-Practice Comparison

- First, responses to a question asking about SEB screening practices from a survey of 1,122 districts were reviewed to determine whether or not districts reported using SEB screening practices.
- If screening practices were mentioned, responses were coded to determine whether screening was reported to occur: a) for targeted groups of students or b) universally for all students.

RESULTS

Table 1.
Comparison of state and district policies around SEB screening.

	State	State Universal SEB Screening Guidance	Districts (N)	Districts I (%)	Districts R (%)	Districts M (%)	Districts - No Screening Info (%)
Mandates K-3 screening targets	LA	R	9	0	0	78	22
General MTSS document (non-behavior specific examples)	CA	I	68	27	0	0	73
	NM	M	6	17	0	0	83
	WI	I	71	0	0	3	97
General MTSS document (behavior specific examples)	ME	I	23	0	0	35	65
	MS	R	20	15	0	0	85
	MT	R	21	0	0	5	95
	PA	I	74	0	0	55	45
	WA	I	32	9	0	0	91
Behavior specific document with behavior specific examples	FL	R	12	0	8	0	92

Note. I = information only; R = recommended; M = mandated

Table 2.
Alignment between district practices and state policies around universal SEB screening.

Universal SEB Screening Guidance	States	Districts (N)	Districts No Screening (%)	Districts Targeted Screening (%)	Districts Universal Screening (%)
Information only	AZ, DE, IA, MI, OK, WI, ME, UT, WA	109	71%	18%	11%
Recommended	AK, AL, AR, CO, CT, FL, ID, IL, KS, KY, LA, MD, MO, MS, MT, ND, NH, NY, OR, PA, SC, SD, VA, WV	200	64%	27%	9%
Mandated	NM	2	0%	100%	0%

METHODS (continued)

State-District Policy Comparison Procedures

- First, a search of district websites was conducted for 1,122 districts across the U.S. to locate district policy handbooks. Of the 1,122 districts, 911 had policy manuals available for review.
- Next, policy handbooks were reviewed for references to SEB screening.
- Of the 911 policy handbooks reviewed, 87 included reference to SEB screening. These handbooks were further reviewed to determine whether language about screening was only informational, indicated a recommended screening practice, or mandated SEB screening.
- District policy information was then linked to state policy information and language across these was compared.

DISCUSSION

State/District Policy Comparison

- 10 states explicitly describe behavioral screening.
- Some consistency exists between districts within states in regard to behavioral screening language
- Some states note behavioral screening as a part of district policies, whereas some mention it as part of RtI/MTSS procedures.
- Guidance varied from general information about screening to mandated or recommended policies.

Alignment of Policies and Practices

- As state-level guidance around SEB screening decreases, the percentage of districts reporting no screening practices increases.
- In the only state to include mandated universal screening policy, administrators in the sampled districts did not report engaging in universal screening.
- In states providing recommendations for universal SEB screening, fewer districts report engaging in screening compared to districts in those states that only provide information.
- Based on these results, some inconsistencies exist between state and district universal SEB screening policies and practices.

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