

RELEVANCE & RIGOR:

Creating the Future of Education Research

ANNUAL PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS MEETING

January 9-10, 2018 • Arlington, VA

Defining and Measuring Risk in Special Education and Early Intervention Research: *Considerations for Social, Emotional, & Behavioral Domains*

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Our Team



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- **And many other collaborators...**

What Is SEB?



It's not why is it important but what is important in SEB assessment...



- *social-behavioral competencies and problems* [IES]
 - NCER: social skills, attitudes, and behaviors; NCSER: behavior problems (in students with or at risk for disabilities)
- *mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders* [National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2009]
 - aligned with psychopathology constructs (DSM and associated problem behaviors): such as depression, conduct disorder, and substance abuse
- *social emotional learning* [CASEL]
 - core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, social awareness
- *school-based adjustment* [e.g. Direct Behavior Rating; Walker et al, 1992]
 - core school-based behavioral competencies: such as respectful, *non*-disruptive, academically engaged
- *trauma, risk-resilience* [e.g. CDC-Kaiser Permanente, Masten & Reed]
 - adverse childhood experiences (abuse, neglect), and/or positive adaptation (at least one close friend, belief that life will work out)

It's not why is it important but what is important in SEB assessment...



- *social-behavioral*
- *mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders*
- *social emotional learning*
- *school-based adjustment*
- *trauma*
- *risk-resilience*
- Our own project...
 - Survey development included substantial cognitive pretesting and advisory board feedback
 - Landed on use of “*social, emotional, and behavioral*” terminology throughout the surveys



Summary Rationale for Our Project

- Before SEB screeners continue to be developed and evaluated, it is critical that teachers, parents, school administrators and mental health personnel, community stakeholders, researchers, and policy-makers understand *if and how* these screeners are being used, and *what factors influence* screener usage and student outcomes.

Our Project: Goal 1 (Exploration)

<https://needs2.education.uconn.edu/>



Arm 1

- **RQ1**: Nationally, what do state and district-level priorities look like with regard to school-based behavior policy?

Arm 2

- **RQ2**: Nationally, do school districts incorporate behavior screening practices? If so, what do those practices look like at elementary and secondary levels?
- **RQ4**: What do key stakeholders perceive as the intended purpose, value, and usability of school-based behavior screening? For those implementing practices, what is the perceived effectiveness?

Arm 3

- **RQ3**: Does implementation of behavior screening practices predict student behavioral outcomes? If so, do practices serve as a partial mediator and moderator for district characteristics, usability, and behavior curricula practices?

What Is Happening in SEB Screening?

RQ1 – state and district-level department of education guidance

RQ2/4 – stakeholder reports of practices and perceptions of purpose, value, and usability



RQ1: state and district guidance

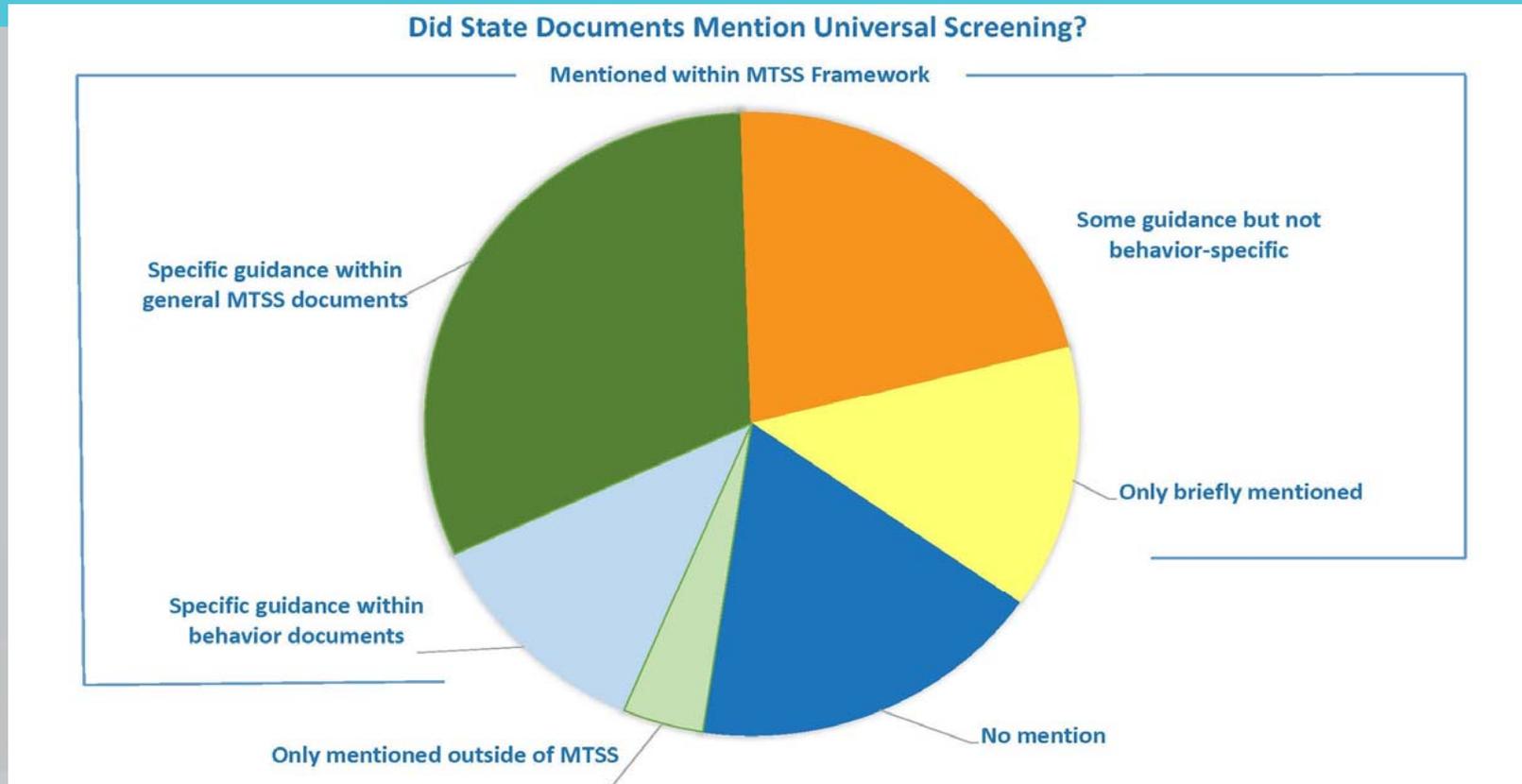
what we did



- **Part 1: We searched department of education websites for documents referencing SEB screening practices in K-12 settings**
 - 124 unique documents were identified across the 50 states and the District of Columbia specifically related to the use of universal. Documents were then coded with regard to guidance provided.
- **Part 2: We conducted follow-up telephone interviews with state officials in order to confirm and add to the information obtained from the search.**
- **Part 3: For those districts participating in our RQ2/4 surveys, we reviewed those websites for info on SEB screening.**
 - Of the 1330 participating public school districts, 911 had policy manuals available, and 87 included references to SEB screening.

RQ1: state and district guidance

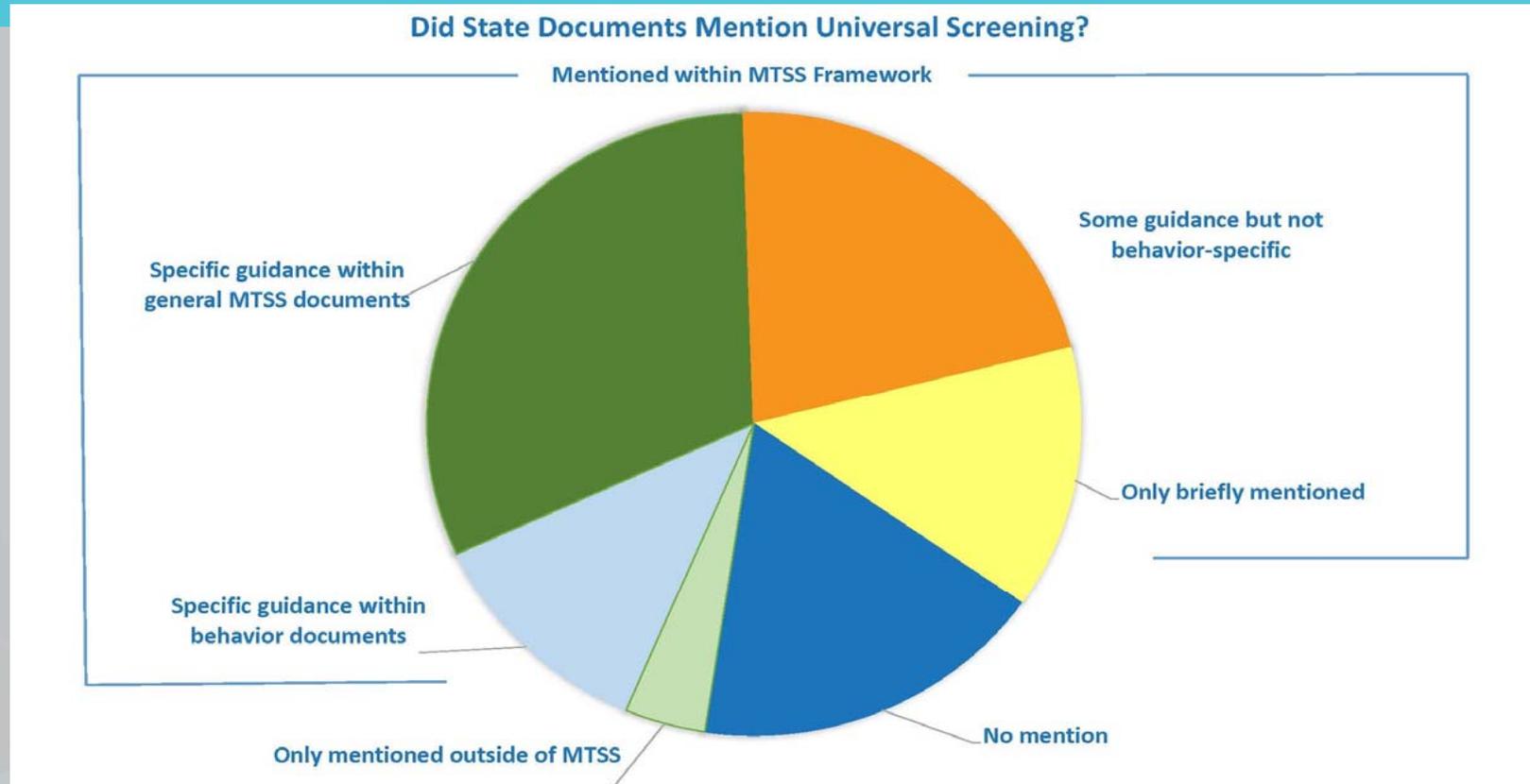
what we found



- **Nearly all (95%) of the states whose websites mentioned universal SEB screening referred to it within the context of describing multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS).**

RQ1: state and district guidance

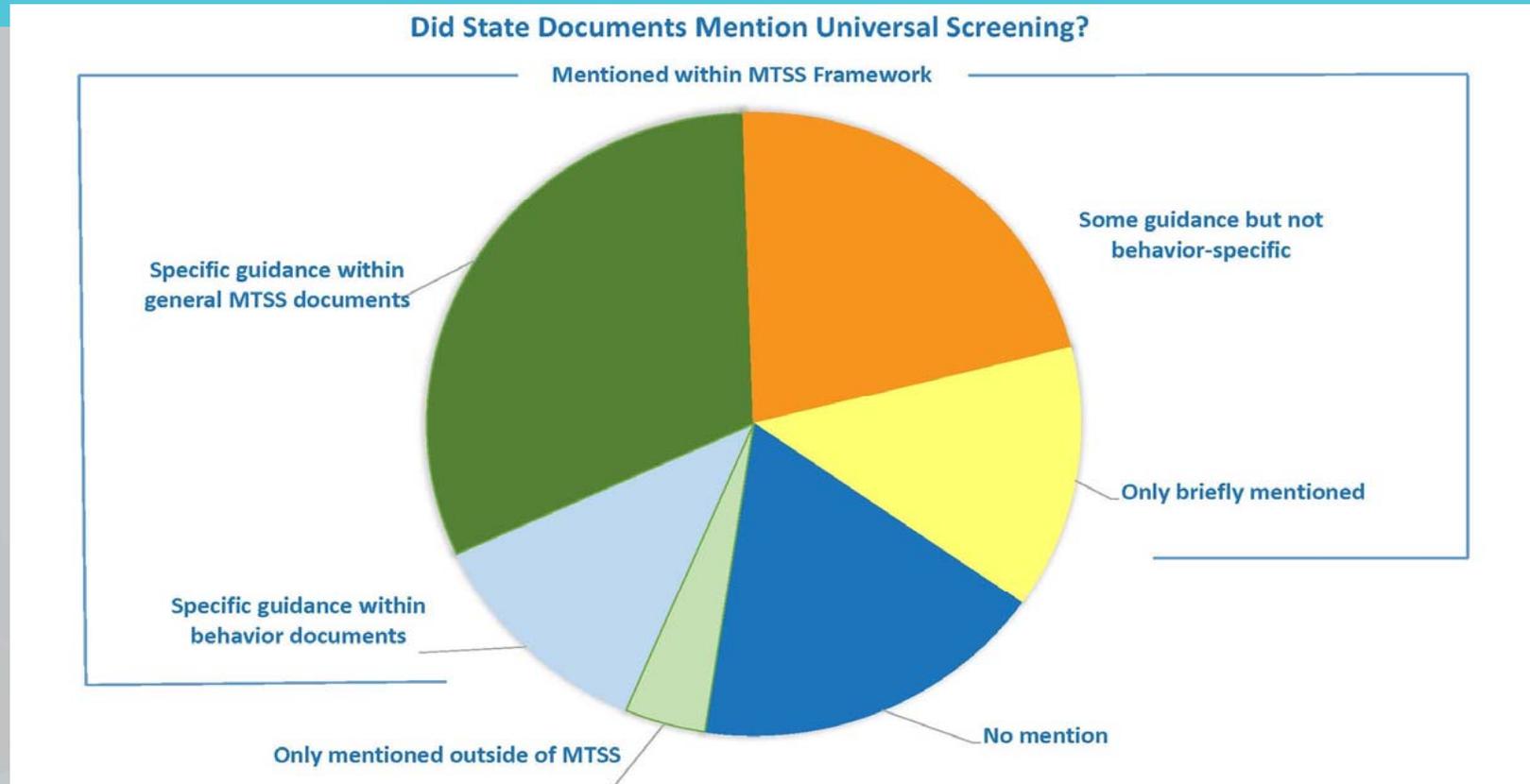
what we found



- **Over half (53%) of states do not mention universal SEB screening or only provide a vague reference to screening on their state Department of Education or Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) websites.**

RQ1: state and district guidance

what we found



- **In slightly over a third (35%) of states, documentation included some reference to universal screening but the level of guidance was minimal.**

RQ1: state and district guidance

what we found



- **Universal Screening for SEB risk was described within an MTSS document focused specifically on behavior in only 6 states (12%).**
 - Only the state of New Mexico provided a mandate for universal screening within the state rule, though it is worth noting that Illinois passed legislation in early 2017 that will require SEB screening for children as part of school entry examinations.
 - But district administrators in New Mexico did not report engaging in universal screening.
- **24 states included policies which recommend universal SEB screening, yet**
 - Only 9% of district-level survey respondents in those 24 states report engaging in it.
 - Across reviewed district policy manuals, reference to SEB screening was present for districts hailing from only 5 of those states.

RQ2: does SEB screening occur in schools? *what we did*



- **Part 1: We developed a comprehensive survey to solicit information about district and school practices and preferences, with emphasis on SEB assessment.**
 - Sections were modified based on stakeholder – district administrator, building administrator, student support personnel, teachers, parents
- **Part 2: We used NCES data to create a sampling frame of public school districts.**
 - The online survey was launched first to the district administrators (resulting sample = 1330 districts), and then to other stakeholders in participating districts.
- **Part 3: We applied weights to result in a nationally representative sample of public school districts in the United States.**

RQ2: does SEB screening occur in schools?

what we found



- **Building Administrators surveyed say their public schools use SEB screening assessments at significantly lower rates than academic and physical health screening assessments.**
- **And, while most schools screen universally for academic and physical health concerns, only a small number conduct universal screening for SEB concerns.**

	Use Academic Screening	Use Physical Health Screening	Use SEB Screening
Yes	92%	71%	32%
No	6%	21%	60%

RQ2: does SEB screening occur in schools?

what we found



- For District Administrators respondents, **16% reported engaging in “universal screening” to identify SEB risk**, with the majority using an internal approach to addressing SEB problems and **12% using an approach based on external referral**

Category	“Most-Often” Used Approach to SEB Screening	%
Refer Externally	Refer students who are exhibiting social, emotional, and behavioral problems to an outside consultant or agency for assistance.	12
Handle Internally	Refer students who are exhibiting social, emotional, and behavioral problems to an internal support team to develop and implement an intervention plan.	55
Handle Internally	Encourage teachers to independently develop and implement an intervention plan to see if a social, emotional, and behavioral problem can be addressed in the classroom and, if the problem does not change, then refer the student for assistance.	10
Universal Screening	Complete a brief social, emotional, and behavioral screening measure for all students, and refer any student falling outside the typical range for assistance.	6
Universal Screening	First have a familiar adult (e.g., teacher) nominate those students exhibiting social, emotional, and behavioral problems, and then complete a screening measure only for those students to determine who gets referred for assistance.	10
Not applicable	No response/none apply	8

RQ2: does SEB screening occur in schools?

what we found



Universal Screening versus Refer Outside School

Usage Factor	ES
Knowledge	0.54
Willingness to Change	0.29
Feasibility	0.32
Family-School Collaboration	0.03
External Collaboration	0.12

Handle Internally versus Refer Outside School

Usage Factor	ES
Knowledge	0.36
Willingness to Change	0.31
Feasibility	0.25
Family-School Collaboration	0.14
External Collaboration	-0.16

District Administrator findings suggest that those districts who engage in universal SEB screening practices are better equipped (knowledge, willingness to change, feasibility) to internally handle SEB issues, with the least equipped districts those who rely on external referral.

[Info. on Usage Rating Profile: <https://urp.uconn.edu/>]

RQ2: does SEB screening occur in schools? *what we found*



- **District Administrators and Building Administrators attitudes align on how schools should generally approach SEB screening.**
- **Yet both surveys find a gap between current and ideal SEB screening practices, with ideal practices supporting less reliance on external referral and greater user of universal screeners.**

Which SEB “Areas” Do Stakeholders Perceive Should be Screened?

RQ2/4 – stakeholder reports of practices and perceptions of purpose, value, and usability



RQ4: what do stakeholders indicate

what we did



- **Note. Same as described for RQ2.**
 - **Part 1: We developed a comprehensive survey to solicit information about district and school practices and preferences, with emphasis on SEB assessment.**
 - **Part 2: We used NCES data to create a sampling frame of public school districts.**
 - **Part 3: We applied weights to result in a nationally representative sample of public school districts in the United States.**

RQ4: what do stakeholders indicate

what we found



- Areas in which universal SEB screening is ***currently*** conducted are more likely in social, general behavior, and mental constructs

Building Administrators			
Areas where Universal SEB Screening is Conducted			
	(n=46)	*Multiple response item	
Aggression	57%	Substance use	28%
Anxiety	57%	Suicide	30%
Attention	54%	Threat to harm others	43%
Depression	57%	Traumatic events	28%
Misconduct	57%	General behavioral risk	76%
Self-esteem/concept	70%	Other	11%
Social skills	83%	Substance use	28%

RQ4: what do stakeholders indicate *what we found*



- **Yet across all stakeholders (administrators, student support personnel, teachers, parents), similar patterns were revealed to support wide inclusion of items on school-based SEB screeners.**
 - **Items across domains (psychopathology, school-based adjustment, risk/resilience, trauma) were endorsed as should or probably should be included by 90% or more of respondents (on average).**
 - **For example, more than nine-in-ten school district administrators say that universal SEB screening definitely or probably should include questions pertaining to adverse childhood experiences.**

SUMMARY



- **Substantial gap** exists between current and desired practice in shifting to SEB screening for proactive purposes, with **overall low percentages of districts engaging in universal screening.**
 - State Administrator - *“Our schools [here] are getting better and becoming more proactive and using formative assessment data around academics but social-emotional health related strengths and needs usually don’t get addressed until they manifest into some type of crisis.”*
- **Tremendous opportunity** is present to support districts in using SEB screeners across a range of domains, acknowledging that **contexts likely matter in choices.**
 - State Administrator - *“Now that MTSS in [our state] is on a very ambitious and widespread implementation plan, it can become a hub that it goes through. So, I think there was resistance. I think there’s opportunity and it will always meet with resistance, but we’ll keep working.”*

Questions, Comments, Contact...



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