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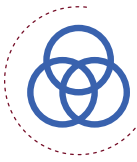
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SYSTEMATIC SCREENING IN TIERED SYSTEMS: Lessons Learned at the Middle and High School Level

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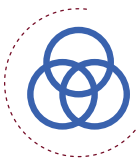
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Purpose

This model demonstration paper features the experiences of four middle and two high schools in one district that were in the first year of implementing a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS).^{*} We summarize the procedures, key findings, and lessons learned regarding conducting systematic screening at middle and high school level.

^{*} The research was supported in part by the Office of Special Education Programs U.S. Department of Education (H326S980003) and Institute of Education Sciences Partnership Grant (R305H150018).



Introduction

With a renewed commitment to systematic efforts as school leaders use multi- tiered systems of supports to meet students' multiple needs as educators navigate through the pandemic era, it is helpful to learn from implementers who screened successfully prior to the pandemic. Systematic screening is a core feature of tiered systems as information gleaned from screening practices can be used to:

- examine the overall level of students' performance for a school or district
- inform teachers' use of low-intensity strategies to maximize engagement (e.g., active supervision, instructional choice)
- suggest which students may need additional Tier 2 or Tier 3 supports.

Screening data from validated screening tools along with data collected by educators as part of traditional school practices can be used to inform decisions at the school, class, and student level. For example, data such as office discipline referrals (ODR), attendance (including tardiness), and nurse visits reflect important information about students' performance and experiences that can be used with data from systematic screening tools to facilitate data-informed decision making efforts (see [Universal Screening – Systematic Screening to Shape Instruction](#)).

In optimal circumstances, each level of prevention – Tier 1 for all, Tier 2 for some, and Tier 3 for a few – would include research-based strategies, practices, and programs. In doing so, implementing

SCHOOLS

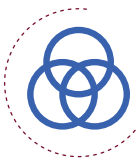
Middle Schools

- 4 US middle schools
- Total: 2,313 students
- Grade: 6th 35%; 7th 34%; 8th 32%
- Gender: 53% Male; 47% Female
- Ethnicity/race: Hispanic 8%; White 75%; Mixed races 9%; Black 7%; Asian/Pacific Islander 4%; Native American/Native Alaskan: 4%

High Schools

- 2 US high schools
- Total: 2,727 students
- Grade: 9th 29%; 10th 24%; 11th 25%; 12th 22%
- Gender: 53% Male; 47% Female
- Ethnicity/race: Hispanic 8%; White 76%; Mixed races 10%; Black 6%; Asian/Pacific Islander 3%; Native American/Native Alaskan: 4%

a complete continuum maximizes the likelihood of students experiencing positive outcomes in academic, behavioral, and social and emotional well-being domains. Such tiered systems also prioritize and facilitate equity goals by leveraging available data to identify and respond to potential challenges (e.g., disproportional disciplinary outcomes for students from specific racial or ethnic groups).



School and University Partnership

The research team formed a partnership with one school district in the Midwest to develop a Ci3T model of prevention for each of their schools. During this process, the Ci3T university-based research team collaborated with district leaders to guide them through selecting a screening tool, developing the systems and structures for implementing screening practices, administering screening, interpreting screening data, and using screening data with other school collected data for decision making (for additional information about the screening process, see [Screening Coordinator Training Manual: A Guide for Installing the SRSS-IE in your School or District](#)).

The research team also provided professional learning opportunities to faculty and staff through multiple avenues, including a series of afterschool professional learning sessions by research team trainers, districtwide presentations, on-demand resources (e.g., YouTube videos), and practice guides.

Procedure

Step 1: Establish a Leadership Team

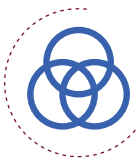
Each participating school built or had a Leadership Team comprised of the principal, two general education teachers, a special education teacher, two or three other individuals (e.g., instructional coaches, counselors, and school psychologists), a parent, and student. In secondary schools, teams also included an additional administrator, parent, and student member. This composition ensured team members represented interested parties who were familiar with the students and school environment.



Figure 1. Systematic Screening Implementation Procedure

Step 2: Attend Professional Learning Opportunities

Each team attended a year-long professional learning series designed to help teams implement and evaluate the MTSS plan at their school. Some professional training content included: (a) the purpose of screening; (b) the administration of the screening tool, (c) the interpretation of the screening results; and (c) how to connect students with appropriate supports. Professional learning opportunities were available to help educators gain foundational knowledge about why and how systematic screening is conducted and stay updated with the latest findings in the literature. Faculty and staff from participating schools provided



overviews and training of screening tools during regularly scheduled faculty meetings.

Step 3: Build Secure Data Management Systems

A secure data management system is an essential component of implementing systematic screening. The district in this study developed a secure, electronic method of screening to ensure student information was populated before screening was completed and that teachers independently completed the screening for each student. The district technology team populated student names and identification numbers for each teacher approximately 30 days before each screening window opened in fall, winter, and spring. Educators were only given access to the screening data sheet for their assigned screening period, and they also received protocols regarding the logistics of data collection and access.

Step 4: Plan, Implement, And Evaluate

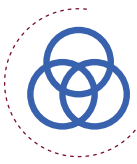
Once a valid screening tool was selected, district leaders created a timeline for conducting screening and leadership teams shared information with faculty and staff. Ideally, the district should allow teachers to get to know their students across different scenarios prior to screening. The participating middle schools determined advisory teachers would conduct screening during the advisory period where social skills instruction took place. Participating high schools chose second period for screening to ensure all students were present.

The second period course offerings also included the full scope of classes (both core and elective courses) offered in traditional high schools.

Schools completed the Student Risk Screening Scale—Internalizing and Externalizing (SRSS-IE) three times throughout the school year in fall, winter, and spring. The fall screening timepoint was conducted 4-6 weeks after the start of the school year, prior to winter break, and 4-6 weeks before the end of the school year. Educators completed the SRSS-IE independently for students in one period (e.g., second-period) at each timepoint, as information and guidance was provided to educators about using the total scores to make decisions.

Step 5: Connect Students to Support

Data from systematic screenings were coded and checked for accuracy prior to data analysis. District and school leadership teams used the data collected to (a) examine overall level of risk at the school-wide level; (b) inform the use of low-intensity, teacher-delivered supports to increase engagement, minimize disruption; and (c) when needed, refer students for additional review to determine if Tier 2 (secondary) and Tier 3 (tertiary) supports might be appropriate (for additional information on interpreting screening data, see [Interpreting Universal Behavior Screening Data: Questions to Consider](#)).

**Table 1. Data Collection**

Measure	Description
Student Risk Screening Scale—Internalizing and Externalizing (SRSS-IE)	The SRSS-IE is a well-established free screening tool. Items assess risk for both externalizing and internalizing behaviors. Homeroom teachers completed the SRSS-IE for each student, rating each behavior on a 4-point, Likert-type scale of never = 0, occasionally = 1, sometimes = 2, and frequently = 3.
GPA	Cumulative performance on a 4-point scale
Course failures	The total number of Ds or Fs earned during the same academic year.
Nurse visits	Number of visits a student made to the school nurse for assistance (e.g., getting a bandage, nausea, fever, somatic complaints)
In-school suspensions	The number of days a student was assigned in-school suspension (a sanction reserved for serious rule infractions such as bullying).

Key Findings

Middle School

Fall SRSS-IE scores – both externalizing and internalizing – were useful for predicting how students fared over the course of the academic year:

- Middle school students scoring in the low-risk *externalizing category* in fall ended the year with higher GPA, fewer course failures, fewer nurse visits, fewer ODRs, and fewer in-school suspensions compared to students beginning in the year in the moderate and high-risk groups for externalizing behaviors.
- Middle school students scoring in the moderate-risk *externalizing category* in the fall ended the year with higher GPA, fewer course failure, fewer ODRs, and fewer in-school suspensions compared to students beginning the year in the high-risk group for externalizing behaviors.
- Middle school students scoring in the low-risk *internalizing category* in fall ended the year with higher GPA, fewer course failures, and fewer

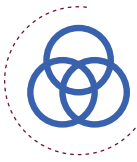
in-school suspensions compared to students beginning the year in the moderate and high-risk groups for *internalizing behaviors*. In addition, middle school students scoring in the low-risk internalizing category in fall ended the year with fewer nurse visits compared to students beginning the year in high-risk groups for internalizing behaviors.

- Middle school students scoring in the moderate-risk *internalizing category* in the fall ended the year with higher GPA, and fewer in-school suspensions compared to students beginning the year in the high-risk group for internalizing behaviors.

High School

Screening data showed similar predictive patterns for high school students as middle school students:

- High school students scoring in the low-risk *externalizing category* in fall ended the year with higher GPA, fewer course failures, fewer nurse visits, fewer ODRs, and fewer in-school suspensions compared to students beginning in the year in the moderate and high-risk groups for externalizing behaviors.



- High school students scoring in the low-risk *internalizing category* in fall ended the year with higher GPA, fewer course failures, fewer nurse visits, and fewer in-school suspensions compared to students beginning the year in the moderate and high-risk groups for internalizing behaviors.

Summary

In sum, middle school and high school screening data can effectively predict not only behavioral but also academic outcomes for middle and high school students, which allows educators to intervene at the earliest sign on concern as well as inform Tier 1 practices.

Lessons Learned

- Given screening scores are related to students' academic and behavioral outcomes, educators can consider examining and interpreting results with multiple sources of data to inform Tier 1 efforts in a building or district as well as develop a supportive plan or course of action for students needing more than Tier 1 has to offer.
- Consider multiple access points to help students develop relationships with school personnel and actively engage in



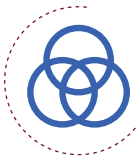
For additional information on the full study, funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, please see:

Lane, K. L., Oakes, W. P., Cantwell, E. D., Royer, D. J., Leko, M., Schatschneider, C., & Menzies, H. M. (2019). Predictive validity of Student Risk Screening Scale for Internalizing and Externalizing scores in secondary schools. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 27, 86-100 doi:10.1177/1063426617744746

school community. Educators might also consider systematically adjusting the intensity levels of support and interventions based on the students' risk level. For example, students at higher risk might receive more intensive support. Addressing students' multiple needs can be accomplished by providing support in a comprehensive, integrated way.

- Ongoing, high-quality professional learning opportunities to improve teacher's knowledge and skills of conducting systematic screening and differentiating effective strategies based on students' needs is an important component of systematic screening.

Figure 2. The Social, Behavioral, Academic Learning Continuum



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