Lessons Learned from District- and School-site Leaders Conducting Systematic Screening

Educational leaders are firmly committed to detecting students at the first sign of concern for both major disorders of childhood: internalizing (e.g., extremely shy, anxious, withdrawn) and externalizing (e.g., noncompliant, aggressive, disruptive). The goal for educators is to use information on their students’ academic, behavior, and social and emotional well-being to shape instructional experiences across the Tier 1, 2, and 3 continuum. Input from educators who have been engaged in the universal behavioral screening process contains valuable information that can help district and school leaders identify priority areas to allocate more resources and create future professional learning opportunities. In this brief, we will highlight results of an online survey of 165 leadership team members from 27 elementary schools representing five school districts from three geographic regions across the United States. All schools were at different stages of implementing an integrated tiered system of support.

Systematic screening is a keystone practice in tiered systems used to shape instruction (see Universal Screening – Systematic Screening to Shape Instruction). In this study (Briesch et al., in press), school-site team members provided information about their current school-based screening practices and their individual perspectives on these practices. We organized information into four topics: (a) educators’ general level of understanding of behavior screening practices, (b) perceived usability of behavior screening practices, (c) perceived strengths and barriers of universal behavior screening, and (d) priority directions for professional learning. We provide guiding questions and practical tips for each topic for educators to consider.

Educator’s general level of understanding of behavior screening practices

What are educators’ general level of understanding of behavior screening practices? Are there differences in understanding across different stages of implementation?

Based on the survey results, the most frequently used behavior screener was the Student Risk Screening Scale for Internalizing and Externalizing (SRSS-IE). Other than standardized behavior screeners, respondents also used classroom observations and office discipline referrals (ODR) to collect data during the screening process. Leadership team members beyond the first year of implementation seemed to be more aware of which screening tools were used in their school or district. Most respondents understood teachers completed universal behavior screenings three times per academic year in fall, winter, and spring. After universal behavior screenings were conducted, respondents most frequently reported schools reviewed the data by group. Respondents in later stages of implementation (i.e., who have implemented for two or more years), reported data were also reviewed by individual school staff. Reviewing screening data by individual school staff is a recommended practice in because it allows educators to quickly connect students to additional supports and inform their instructional practices. Schools in their first year of implementation were less aware of this practice.
Respondents beyond the first year of implementation described the major ways they used universal behavior screening data in combination with other data sources to connect students to Tier 2 and Tier 3.

Tips for understanding behavior screening at your school or district

1. Ensure educators know which screening tool is being used at the school and provide professional learning to support screening practices.

2. Consider regular professional learning opportunities to enhance educators’ understanding of the screening tool used by the school district, the frequency at which screening occurs, and the main informant of the screening process.

3. Provide information regarding how to use behavior screening data to connect students to Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports regardless of the stage of implementing behavior screening.

Perceived usability of behavior screening practices

How do individuals view the usability of behavior screening practices, specifically: usability, willingness to change, feasibility, family-school collaboration, and external support? Are there differences in these constructs across different stages of implementation?
When rating their level of agreement on a Likert-type scale between 1 = Strongly Disagree to 6 = Strongly Agree, respondents indicated overall high agreement on the usability of behavior screening practices. Specifically, respondents reported:

- Collaboration and communication with families were needed to support behavior screening ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.23$).
- Consultative and community support were needed to support behavior screening ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.14$).
- They understood how to carry out the screening process ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.74$)
- They were willing to use new strategies to address student behavior problems ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.83$)
- The time and resources required to conduct behavior screening was acceptable ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 0.62$).

Respondents who were in years 4-6 of implementation had higher levels of understanding compared to Year 1 respondents, suggesting continuous professional learning, experience with screening, and implementing an integrated, tiered system leads to a greater understanding of behavior screening.
Tips for understanding usability of behavior screening practices

1. Provide continuous professional learning to help educators use screening data along with other data collected as part of regular school practices to inform instruction.

2. Support ongoing communication and cooperation with families and other community members about screening.

3. Ensure teachers have swift access to behavior screening results.

Perceived strengths and barriers of universal behavior screening practices

What do educators consider as strengths and barriers of universal behavior screening? Are there differences in perceived strengths and barriers across different stages of implementation?

Regarding the strengths of universal behavior screening practices in their schools, respondents reported:

- General agreement that the screener used targeted behaviors most relevant to student success ($M = 3.55, SD = 0.64$)

- Screening was effective in identifying student challenges ($M = 3.31, SD = 0.91$)

- Screener provided information to guide intervention decisions ($M = 2.98, SD = 0.86$)
Respondents also reported some concerns about behavior screening. Survey results showed the top three educators’ concerns were the ability to provide follow-up services for students who were identified, if the screening tool reflected all concerns, and the availability of trained staff to support educators. As such, schools might consider providing ongoing professional learning to assist individual educators as well as Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention teams in using screening data along with other data collected as part of regular school practices (e.g., reading and math screening data, office discipline referral data, attendance, nurse visits) to inform instruction. Schools could also consider gathering input from educators to identify their current challenges and difficulties in conducting behavior screening and provide support and modifications to current practices.

In terms of differences across different stages of implementation, respondents in their first year of Ci3T implementation were less likely to have concerns about the ability of educators to provide follow-up services to students identified as in need.

**Tips for understanding the strengths and barriers of universal behavior screening practices**

1. Provide continued professional learning opportunities to increase understanding of the purposes for universal behavior screening and help educators build fundamental understanding about the “whys” and “hows” of universal behavior screening.

2. Create a system-level plan defining roles and responsibilities of all involved members to ensure a smooth screening process and timely follow-up services to the students identified as in need.

3. Enhance the abilities of educators to interpret data and make data-based decisions to connect students to different levels of support by providing continued professional learning.

4. Use your schools’ Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention grids alongside screening data (academic and behavior) and other data collected for all students to inform instruction.
Priority directions for professional learning

What areas do respondents prioritize for professional learning, and what are their preferred avenues for accessing this training? Are there differences in professional learning priorities and avenues between respondents at schools at different stages of implementation?

Respondents identified two areas for professional learning that might be beneficial for them, which included understanding how to (a) make intervention decisions based on behavior screening data, and (b) use data from multiple sources to identify students at risk for behavioral challenges. There were no significant differences in professional learning priorities between respondents across different implementation stages.

Respondents ranked their preferred way to receive professional learning (PL), shown below. Respondents in later years of implementation showed more interest in professional learning communities and less interest in individualized coaching.

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**Tips for Designing Professional Learning Offerings**

1. Focus on teaching educators how to use multiple sources of schoolwide data alongside universal behavior screening data to identify students who might need additional support.

2. Solicit input from educators to identify a preferred format of professional learning. Educators are more likely to benefit from professional learning opportunities that consider their specific needs, preferences, and stage of implementation.

3. Provide professional learning opportunities that fit the need of the educators in your school or district.


This document was supported from funds provided by the Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports cooperative grant supported by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) of the U.S. Department of Education (H326S180001). Mohamed Soliman, MA, EdS serves as the project officer. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, or enterprise mentioned in this document is intended or should be inferred.

**Suggested Citation for this Publication**