Guidance for Systematic Screening: Lessons Learned from Practitioners

Systematic screening is a proactive process for detecting students at the first sign of concerns, particularly for those who may need interventions or supports beyond Tier 1 efforts. To empower the general education community in determining students' unique needs, the systematic screening process includes the collection and analysis of multiple sources of data. Specifically, data from screening tools, behavioral infractions, formative assessments, course progress, attendance, and nurse visits can be reviewed in tandem to ensure students have early and equitable access to interventions as part of the Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) problem-solving process.

In the PBIS brief, *Systematic Screening for Behavior in Current K-12 Instructional Settings*, assistance is offered for how schools can use behavior screening data. As part of Tier 1, screening data can be used with other data collected as part of regular school practices at multiple time points across the school year (e.g., fall, winter, and spring). Taken together, these data may be used in multiple ways. At the school level, educators may examine the overall level of behavior and social emotional well-being of the student body. To support instructional practices at a classroom level, data can be used to determine the need for low-intensity, teacher-delivered supports (e.g., instructional choices and precorrection). Data can also be used as a first step in discussing students who may need more intensive Tier 2 and/or 3 supports according to their needs using the problem-solving process. Regular review of data and early detection allows educators to respond with appropriate interventions and supports to promote students' academic, behavioral, and social emotional well-being outcomes. A potential misconception is that systematic screening procedures are for special education evaluation and reevaluation purposes. Systematic screening is implemented as part of on-going implementation efforts in a tiered system to detect and support students at the first signs of concerns.

As schools across the country engage in systematic screening processes as part of tiered systems, screening tools are being implemented at increasing rates. In this brief, we describe experiences of three school districts in various U.S. geographic regions as they installed screening tools as part of their screening processes. Education leaders have generously shared their advice for practitioners throughout the nation. We share five lessons learned from district leaders, including some selected quotes (see boxes). Leaders' insights may be helpful for educators already involved in systematic screening as well as those who are newer to the process.

A Tale of Three Districts

We highlight the stories of three school districts. They represent large, medium, and small districts with schools in various locales (e.g., urban, suburban, town, and rural) in the Midwestern and Northeastern U.S. In each case, educational leaders selected, adopted, and installed systematic behavior screening as part of developing their integrated, tiered system of support to address students' academic, behavioral, and social emotional well-being needs.

Schools in these districts identified district and school leadership teams to engage in a six-part, manualized year-long training series (see www.ci3t.org/building). In the first two sessions, they learned about and drafted their purpose statement, schoolwide expectations, roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, and procedures for teaching and reinforcing. During session 3, they learned about procedures for monitoring implementation and student outcomes, with an emphasis on systematic screening. They created an assessment schedule to list all available data sources for decision making (e.g., office discipline referrals, attendance, academic progress data, referrals for supports). Academic and behavior screening tools were an important part of their comprehensive assessment plan to detect accurately students for whom Tier 1 efforts alone were insufficient to meet their individual needs.

District and school team members learned about a variety of valid and reliable screening tools

(see Systematic Screening Tools: Universal Behavior Screeners), then instituted plans at the district level for decision making. All three-

district leadership teams decided it was important to have a common screening measure across their district's schools to be able to monitor levels and shifts in risk at the district-, school-, grade-, as well as individual student-level. However, they also felt it was important to have school input to ensure school leaders felt comfortable with the screening tool and ensuing process. So, each followed a similar procedure. Following session 3, each school leadership team was asked to short-list three screeners that met their criteria (e.g., school level, behaviors of interest; see Systematic Screening Tools: Universal Behavior Screeners). They then submitted their short list to district leaders who combined and further shortened the list to

> It is imperative to help administrators feel comfortable with screening.
> –District Ci3T Coordinator

three district-wide options based on additional criteria (e.g., resources, data management system; see Selecting a Universal Behavior Screening Tool: Questions to Consider). One district had a principal leadership group, with leaders representing each school level and

district administrators, who engaged in the selection process. Another district trained schools across consecutive years, and so, early adopting schools shared in the initial decision making. Next, they examined available evidence. District administrators contacted publishers for information about commercially available tools, accessed freely-available information, and considered a number of factors, such as teacher time to complete, costs to access and maintain, reliability and validity for their student populations. They made decisions and shared information back with school leadership teams. These three districts prioritized the rigor of available evidence, teacher time, and accessibility and usefulness of data for educators to make informed instructional decisions.

We offer the following tips to educational leaders who are considering or preparing to adopt and install systematic behavior screening as part of their SW-PBIS framework.

Experiences from the Field

1 Take time to prepare.

Taking the time to prepare will help everyone feel more comfortable and competent with screening. There are multiple layers to these preparations. First, prepare school leaders so they are fully informed of the 'how' and 'why' of screening. It is essential the principal provide a clear purpose to leadership teams and staff. The school leadership team establishes roles and responsibilities for the screening process and provides ongoing professional learning. They answer questions such as how will we communicate with faculty and staff as well as families? Who will prepare or

check screening tools prior to each timepoint? Who will check for completion and follow up to ensure all students are screened? Who will organize all data sources for decision-making by district leaders, school leaders, school leadership teams, grade/department level teams, and teachers? How will we support educators new to our district in learning about our systematic screening efforts? By clearly outlining an action plan, district and school leaders are setting educators up for success with efficient and useful practices in place.

> You need to be very intentional about … training the staff members in advance of doing the screening, … so we said, 'Here, we're going to do it. Here are the instructions, … here's the why that we're doing it. Now let's go do it.' But it needed to be more robust and more intentional.
> - District Ci3T Coordinator

2 Set clear roles for staff during the screening process.

Clear roles for everyone involved in screening can help make the process manageable and productive. Consider selecting two team members to serve as the screening coordinators. Two leaders take responsibility for ensuring screeners are prepared, the screening window

opens and closes on time, all data are captured

> So, each school has a point person from their Ci3T team that's ... been identified. It's one to two people, usually, that ... oversee at the school level to ... just provide reminders, those basic reminders of how to complete the screening aligned with best practices. - District Behavior, Social, Emotional Coach

and scored and then shared back with educators, as appropriate. Two leaders are selected for sustainability – if one leader moves on to other experiences, the expertise is retained. Most often the whole leadership team supports educators in completing the screening at each timepoint, with attention to continued professional learning.

> When we started the screening process, the first thing the team decided was, hey, we've got to explain to people why we're doing this... to help them understand why we chose the screener that we did, and how it works and why this information is going to be helpful for us as a building... it's also going to help you as a classroom teacher in what you do from day to day. So, ... that was the beginning piece of that professional development, to give them the reason why. – Principal

3 Find a data system that works for you.

Systematic screening using a standardized screening instrument requires the collecting, scoring, and sharing back of data for analysis. Therefore, it is important to have a system in place that makes it easy for educators to access data for use. This can have an impact on classroom, school, or district wide decision making. For example, one district Comprehensive, Integrated, Three-tiered (Ci3T) model

> Even missing one teacher's data at a grade level can really throw off the results.
> – Elementary Principal

of prevention coordinator noted their district has benefited from a data system that holds screening data as well as academic information, attendance records, and state testing scores. Such a system may range from spreadsheets to learning management systems depending on the resources available for investment. Further, it is critical that the team follow guidelines for protecting the confidentiality of students' educational data.

4 Review data in a timely way for instructional decision-making.

Another consideration is how to make sure data are readily available for decision making. District leaders agreed that specific individuals need to be appointed to the various roles involved in reviewing data. For example, they recommended using these data to inform the work of teams that provide leadership and

> Our mental health team used the data from the screening as a data point in planning for the needs of individual students for Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions.
> - Principal

specialized services such as the mental health team, student support teams, district leadership team, and building leadership team. An elementary principal suggested coordinating the teams by appointing a team leader to guide communication between teams. Coordination created a point of contact for questions. They noted coordinated efforts were necessary as part of the schools' data-based decision-making process to ensure all students receive appropriate supports (e.g., Tier 2 or Tier 3). The timelier the access to data the more efficient the decision making and students' access to interventions.

> We have a dashboard and so [teachers] are able to complete that screening right within that dashboard that collects the results. So, it's all on our secure server.
> - District Behavior, Social, Emotional Coach

5 Increase transparency with sharing data.

As with any information collected, it is important to share relevant information with administrators, faculty and staff, families, and school board members. In one district, an elementary principal provided an infographic update every year that included screening data aggregated at the school level to show shifts in the percentage of students at low-, moderate-, and high-risk over time. This information is shared in a community meeting, allowing the principal to communicate to the community ongoing progress toward meeting the school's mission and purpose.

> We just learned by experience that anytime we …collect data from [teachers], …that you've got to give it back to them, you've got to be transparent.
> –Principal

Conclusion

Systematic screening processes are a central feature of tiered systems as they can help inform instruction and inform decisions to connect students to Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports. In this brief, we shared three districts' experiences with implementing systemic screening, sharing their leaders' tips for success.

> It's just, … it's powerful. That data is powerful. And screeners are just a piece of that data. – Principal

References

Forness, S., Freeman, S., Paperella, T., Kauffman, J., & Walker, H. M. (2012). Special education implications of point and cumulative prevalence for children with emotional and behavioral disorder. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 20*, 4–18.