Exploring the National Landscape of Behavioral Screening in US Schools

Findings from the NEEDs² project
Funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (R305A140543)

Symposium presented at the 2019 NASP Convention – Feb. 26, 2019

Objectives

- To understand the national landscape of state guidance about and district approaches to social, emotional, and behavioral screening approaches

- To gain knowledge about stakeholder beliefs about social, emotional, and behavioral problems and approaches to school screening

- To identify opportunities to enhance their work in social, emotional, and behavioral screening

Key Personnel

- **Sandy Chafouleas, PhD**
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- **Betsy McCoach, PhD**
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  - Co-PI: Dept. of Public Policy, University of Connecticut

- **Helene Marcy, MPP**
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What is SEB?

social, emotional, & behavioral

Many related terms…

- *social-behavioral*
- *mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders*
- *school mental health*
- *social emotional learning*
- *school-based adjustment*
- *risk-resilience*
- *trauma*

The NEEDs² Project Rationale

- <u>before</u> SEB screening assessments continue to be developed and evaluated,

- we need to understand *if and how* these screeners are being used,

- and *what factors influence* use and outcomes

Exploration Project: RQs

Part 1

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

Part 2

- <u>RQ2</u>: Nationally, do school districts incorporate behavior screening practices? If so, what do those practices look like at elementary and secondary levels?
- <u>RQ4</u>: 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?

Part 3

- <u>RQ3</u>: 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 We Did: Mixed Methods

- **Part 1:**
  - Searched department of education websites for documents referencing SEB screening practices in K-12 settings
  - Conducted follow-up telephone interviews with state officials in order to confirm and add to the information obtained from the search.
  - For those districts participating in our RQ2/4 surveys, we reviewed those websites for info on SEB screening.

- **Parts 2/3:**
  - Developed SEB surveys for 5 stakeholder groups (district administrator, building administrator, student support personnel, teacher, parent)
  - Secured participation from a nationally representative sample of U.S. public school districts
  - Created a database of variables using:
    - NCES 2013-14 Common Core of Data
    - Stanford Education Data Archive
    - State & district-level reported special education data
    - US Dept of Ed Civil Rights Data

Take-Away Summary & Questions

1. State-level guidance on SEB screening is limited – districts are left to make decisions on own.

2. Academic and physical health screening practices are more established than for SEB.

3. SEB assessment approaches used by districts and schools vary widely.

4. Administrators perceive tensions between current and ideal SEB approaches.

5. Knowledge and beliefs have an important role in directions for SEB service.

6. All stakeholder groups strongly support a role for schools in SEB screening.

Paper 1

Emily Auerbach, University of Connecticut

Stephanie Long, Northeastern University
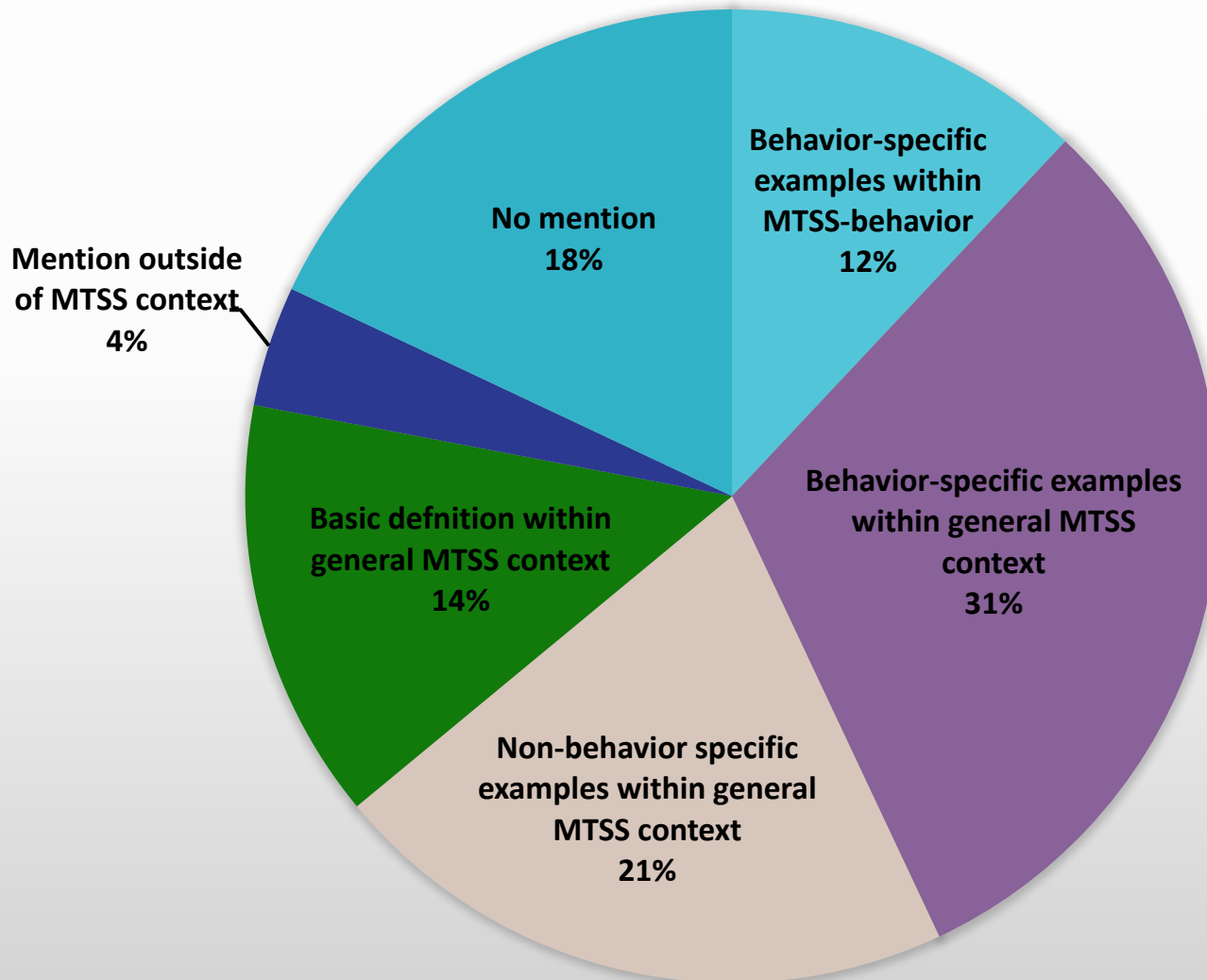
Introduction/Background

- This paper includes three related studies:

  - 1. A study conducting a systematic national review of state-level websites to identify the degree to which mission statements, policies, and initiatives include specific reference to SEB screening.

  - 2. A follow-up study with a small sample of State Department of Education (SDE) employees to confirm findings from the web search and coding of SDE materials and supplement findings with perspectives on the history, current, and future landscape of SEB policies and initiatives in K-12 education.

  - A study conducting a review of the policy manuals/handbooks published by a national sample of 1,330 school districts.
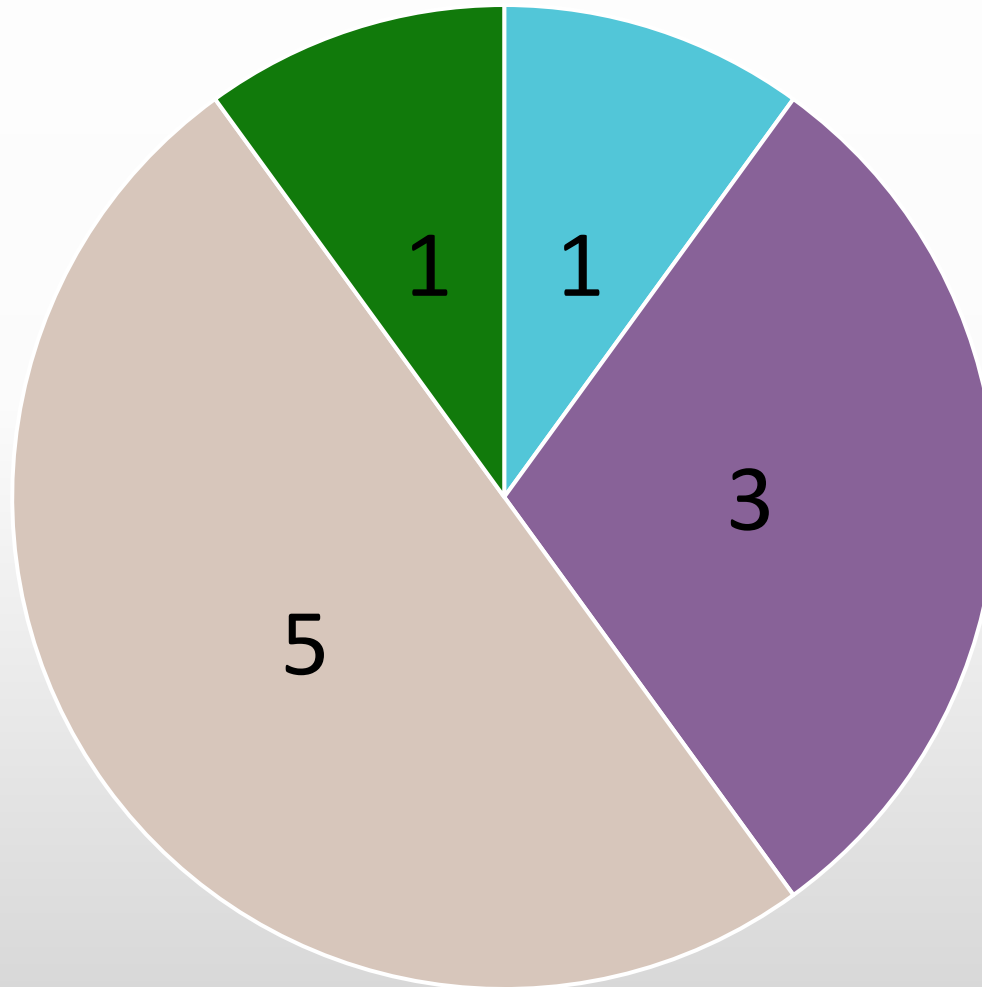
State-Level Findings

- A total of 124 unique documents that specifically related to the use of universal SEB screening practices in K-12 settings were identified across 50 states and the District of Columbia.

- Results indicated that it was most common for states to recommend use of SEB screening (38%), provide basic definitional information (42%), or to make no mention of SEB screening (18%); however, one state mandated SEB screening.

States with at least one document specifically referencing universal SEB screening

Behavior-specific examples within MTSS-behavior
12%

Behavior-specific examples within general MTSS context
31%

Non-behavior specific examples within general MTSS context
21%

Basic defnition within general MTSS context
14%

Mention outside of MTSS context
4%

No mention
18%

State Universal SEB Screening Guidance

- Mandates K-3 screening targets (LA)
- General MTSS document (non-behavior specific examples) (CA, NM, WI)
- General MTSS document (behavior specific examples) (ME, MS, MT, PA, WA)
- Behavior specific document with behavior specific examples (FL)

Follow-Up Interviews

- Interviews were conducted with 11 SDE employees responsible for supporting state-level SEB screening documentation.

- We asked participants:

  - Whether our findings reflected the current status of requirements/recommendations in their state and the context for the current status

  - Whether they would like to add information to our findings for their state, including future directions for requirements/recommendations

  - What they perceive to be opportunities and challenges in school-based SEB screening

Agreement with Initial Findings and Context of Requirements/Recommendations

- All participants agreed with initial findings and provided information on the history behind the current status of SEB screening in their state.

    - 55% noted that additional information beyond initial findings was available

- Two primary categories cited as having influence on current context:

    - Systems-Level Practices (n = 11)

        - MTSS/RTI (n = 7)

        - PBIS (n = 4)

        - SEL (n = 3)

        - School Climate (n = 2)

    - Mental/Behavioral Health (n = 6)

        - Grants (n = 5)

        - Mental Health Initiatives (n = 3)

        - Behavioral Health Initiatives (n = 2)

Additional Information Regarding Current and Future Directions

- All participants contributed information beyond the initial findings about what was currently happening in their state; 8 participants provided information about future directions.

- Three primary categories within current context:
  - Legislation (n = 3)
  - Pressure to change SEB screening practices (n = 6)
  - Awareness/attention to SEB screening (n = 4)

- Four primary categories within future directions:
  - Legislation (n = 3)
  - Development and/or revision of state policy documents (n = 4)
  - New administrators pushing initiatives (n = 2)
  - Collaboration/partnerships with other organizations (n = 2)

Opportunities and Challenges in SEB Screening

Opportunities

- Awareness of importance of SEB screening across state- and district-level stakeholders (n = 4)

- Grants and/or federal support (n = 3)

- Teacher support for screening (n = 2)

- State education leaders' desire to support districts and other stakeholders in screening practices (n = 3)
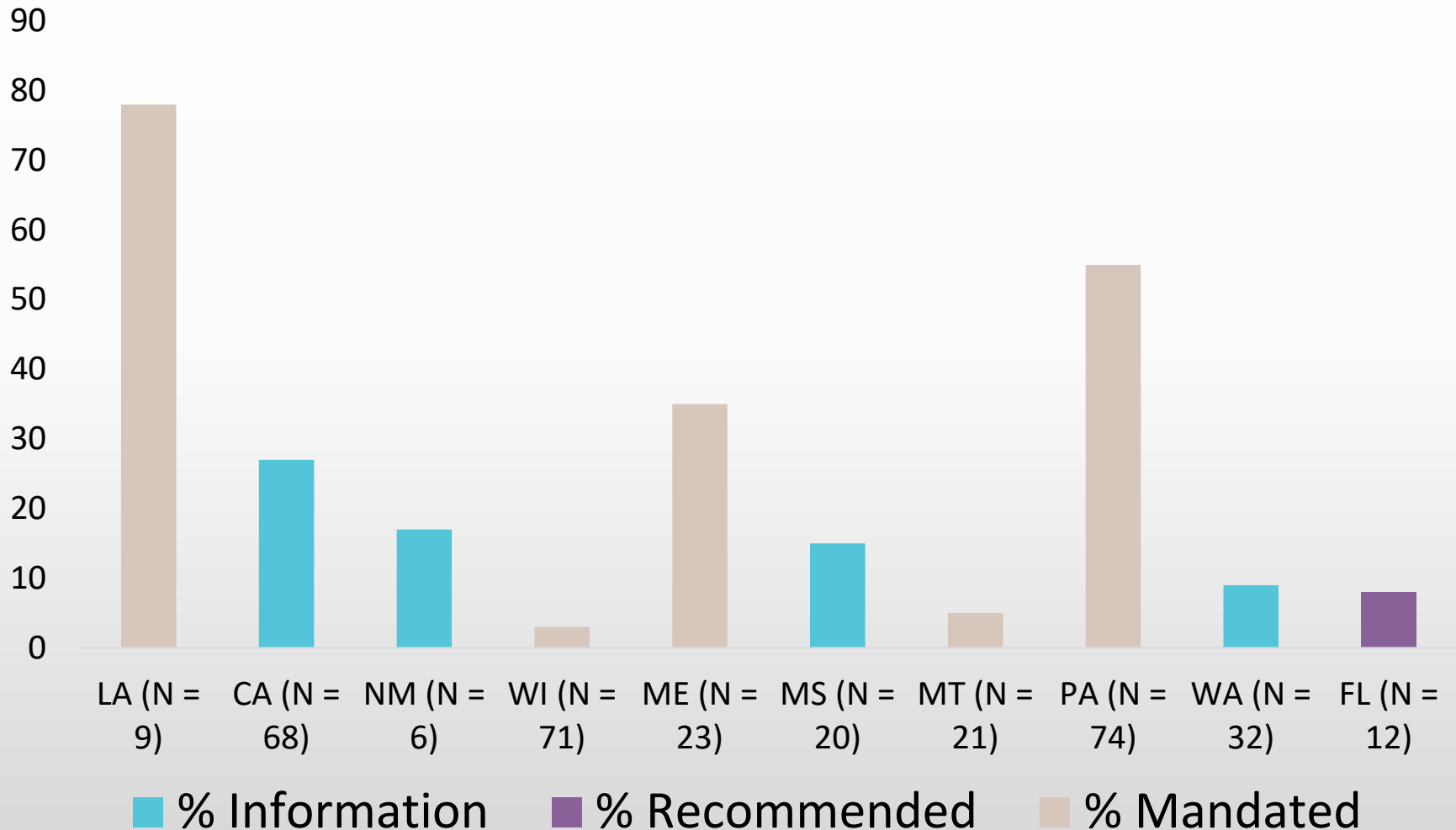
- MTSS currently in place (n = 4)

Challenges

- Time at the state-, district-, and school-level to devote to SEB screening (n = 2)

- Resources (internal and external) to devote to SEB screening (n = 8)

- Buy-in from parents, teachers, and/or administrators (n = 4)

- Implementation and data (n = 5)

- Lack of a common understanding of importance of SEB screening across state agencies and districts (n = 2)

District-Level Findings

- Of the 1,330 districts included in the search, 87 policy manuals were found to meet inclusion criteria.

- 10 states contained districts that explicitly described behavioral screening.

- District-level findings indicate that, although some consistency existed across district policies within the same state, the level of SEB screening guidance provided in district policies varied across states.

District Universal SEB Screening Guidance

90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0

LA (N = 9) | CA (N = 68) | NM (N = 6) | WI (N = 71) | ME (N = 23) | MS (N = 20) | MT (N = 21) | PA (N = 74) | WA (N = 32) | FL (N = 12)

■ % Information   ■ % Recommended   ■ % Mandated

State-District Policy Comparison

- For the majority of states, inconsistencies were found in the level of guidance provided by in district- and state-level documents, with over 50% of district-level policies providing more detailed SEB screening guidance than the state-level documents.

- Some consistency existed between districts within states in regard to behavioral screening language.

- Some states noted behavioral screening as a part of district policies, whereas some mentioned 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 decreased, the percentage of districts reporting no screening practices increased.

- 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 reported engaging in screening compared to districts in those states that only provided information.

- Based on these results, some inconsistencies exist between state and district universal SEB screening policies and practices.

State-District Comparison

Table 1. Alignment between district practices and state policies around universal SEB screening.				
Universal SEB Screening Guidance	**States**	**Districts No Screening (%)**	**Districts Targeted Screening (%)**	**Districts Universal Screening (%)**
Information only (N=109)	AZ, DE, IA, MI, OK, WI, ME, UT, WA	71	18	11
Recommended (N = 200)	AK, AL, AR, CO, CT, FL, ID, IL, KS, LA, MD, MO, MS, MT, ND, NH, NY, OR, PA, SC, SD, VA, WV	64	27	9
Mandated (N = 2)	NM	0	100	0

Take-Away #1: State-level guidance on SEB screening is limited – districts are left to make decisions on own.

NEEDs²

- **Over half (53%) of states do not mention universal SEB screening** or only provide a vague reference.

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

- 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 from only 5 of those states.

Take-Away Summary & Questions

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3. SEB assessment approaches used by districts and schools vary widely.

4. Administrators perceive tensions between current and ideal SEB approaches.

5. Knowledge and beliefs have an important role in directions for SEB service.

6. All stakeholder groups strongly support a role for schools in SEB screening.

Paper 2

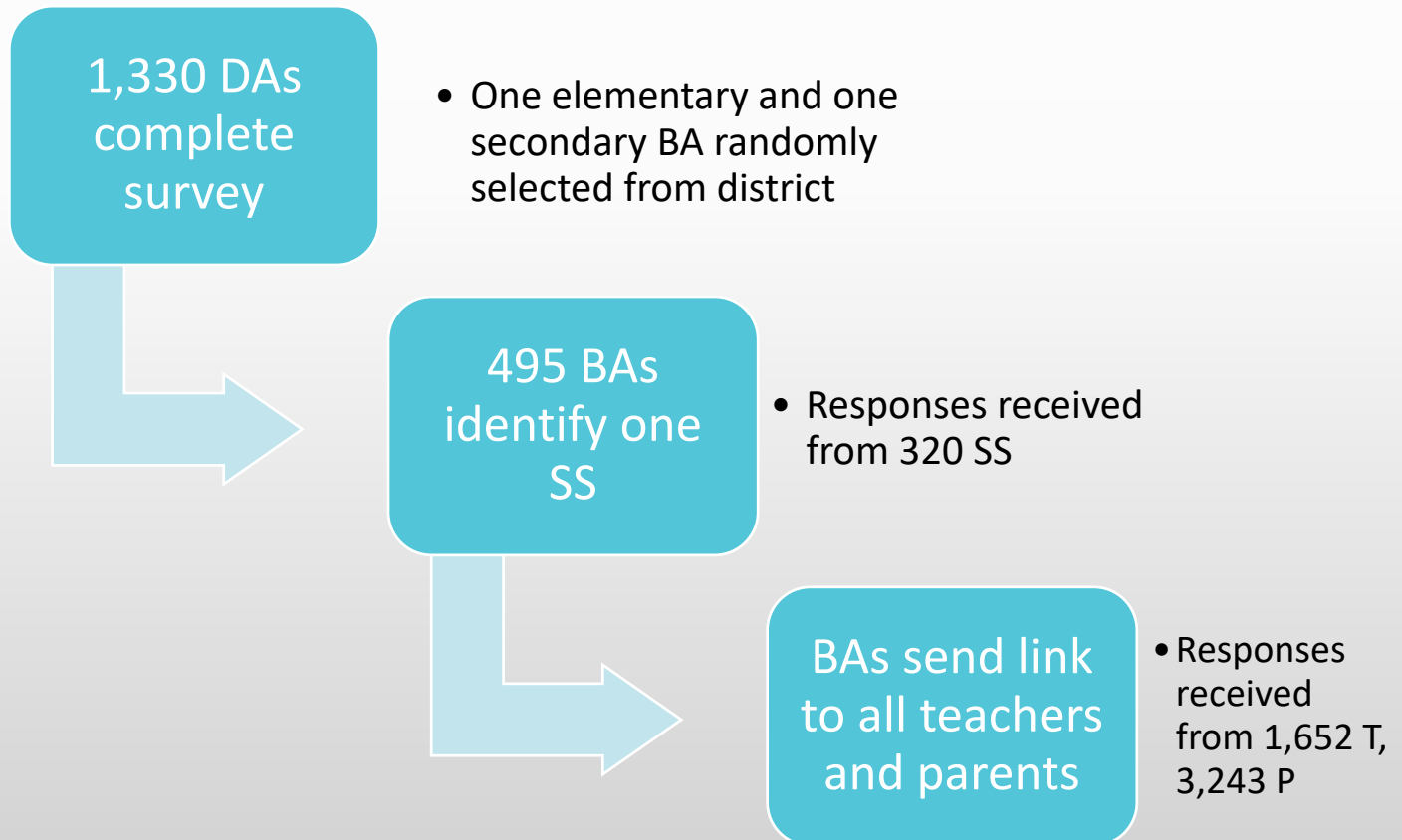Taylor Koriakin, University of Connecticut

Katherine Connolly, University of Connecticut

Amy Briesch, Northeastern University

Participants

- School districts (N = 12,132) identified through 2013-14 Common Core of Data Local Education Agency Universe Survey

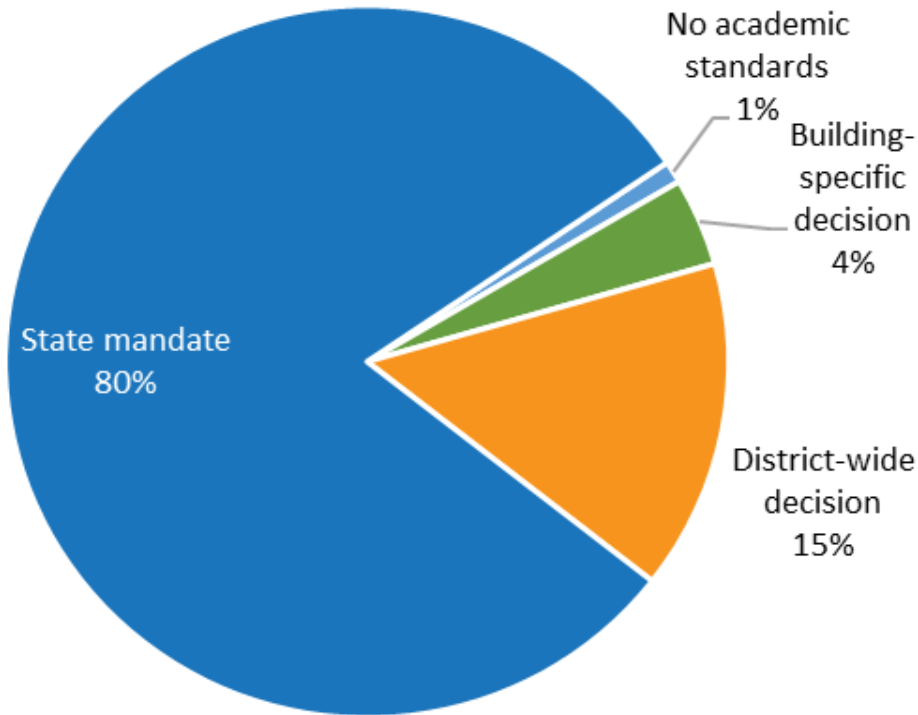**1,330 DAs complete survey**

- One elementary and one secondary BA randomly selected from district

495 BAs identify one SS

- Responses received from 320 SS

BAs send link to all teachers and parents

- Responses received from 1,652 T, 3,243 P

Surveys

	DA	BA	SS	T	P
Academic Standards	X				
SEB Standards	X				
Academic Screening		X	X		
Health Screening		X	X		
SEB Screening		X	X		
SEB Programs	X	X	X		
Knowledge and beliefs re: SEB problems	X	X	X	X	X
Ideal Approach	X	X	X	X	
Current SEB Approach and Perceived Usability	X	X	X	X	

Academic and SEB Standards

Academic Standards
n=1290

- State mandate 80%
- No academic standards 1%
- Building-specific decision 4%
- District-wide decision 15%

SEB Standards
n=1200

- No SEB standards 56%
- Building-specific decision 14%
- District-wide decision 21%
- State mandate 9%
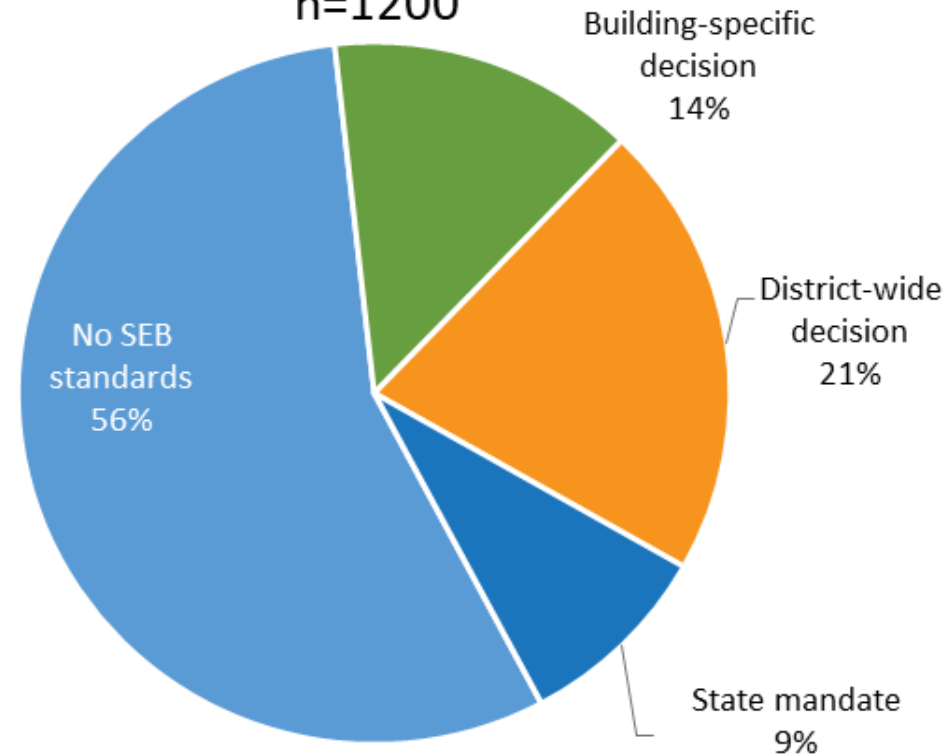
BA reported screening practices

	Elementary (N = 218)	Secondary (N = 210)	Both (e.g., K-8, K-12) (N = 47)	Overall (N = 475)
Uses academic screening assessments	98%	85%	96%	92%
Uses health screening assessments	78%	64%	68%	71%
Uses SEB screening assessments	32%	36%	15%	32%

What do schools screen for?

- Reading/Literacy
  - 93% elementary / 66% secondary
- Math
  - 78% elementary / 63% secondary
- Written Language
  - 22% elementary / 25% secondary

What do schools screen for?

	Elementary	Secondary	Both	Overall
Social skills	12%	6%	0%	8%
General behavioral risk	10%	5%	4%	7%
Self-esteem/Self-concept	9%	5%	0%	7%
Aggression	8%	4%	2%	6%
Anxiety	7%	5%	2%	6%
Depression	6%	6%	2%	6%
Misconduct	8%	4%	2%	6%
Attention	8%	3%	2%	5%
Threat to harm others	5%	4%	0%	4%
Substance use	1%	5%	0%	3%
Suicide	2%	4%	0%	3%
Traumatic events	4%	2%	0%	3%
Other/Unspecified	1%	1%	0%	1%

Take-Away #2: Academic and physical health screening practices are more established than for SEB.
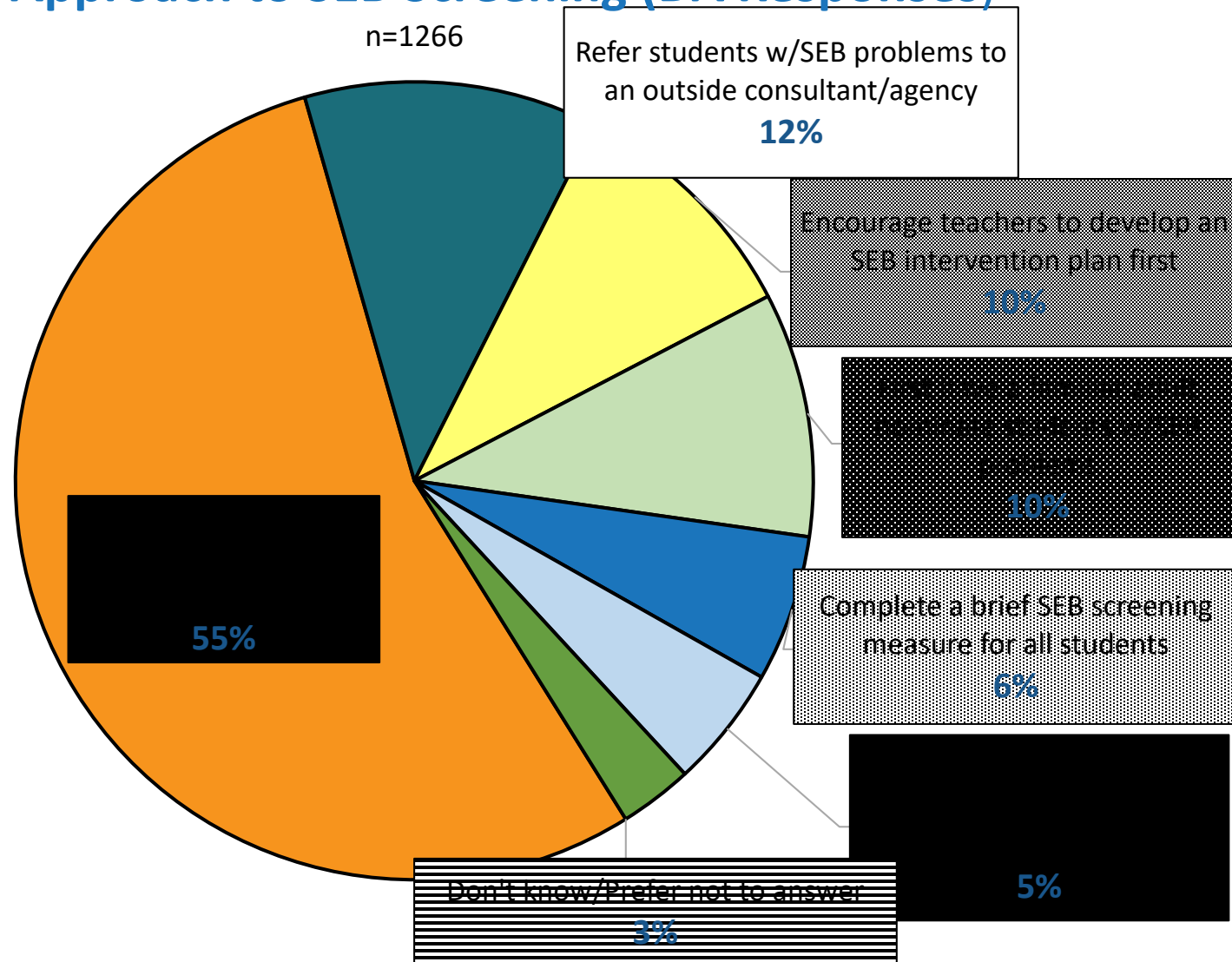
NEEDs²

- School building administrators (BAs) reported **high levels of both academic and physical health screening** at the **elementary** (Academic = 98%, Health = 78%) and **secondary** (Academic = 85%, Health = 64%) levels.

- In contrast, **only a third reported using SEB screenings**.

  - Reported rates of SEB screening were roughly similar at the elementary (32%) and secondary (36%) levels

- Similar trends apply to standards, in that almost all U.S. public school districts report having academic standards yet less than half have SEB standards. Thus, **the presence of school-based SEB standards is the exception**, not the norm.

Reported SEB Assessment Approaches

District Approach to SEB Screening (DA Responses)

n=1266

Refer students w/SEB problems to an outside consultant/agency
12%

Encourage teachers to develop an SEB intervention plan first
10%

10%

Complete a brief SEB screening measure for all students
6%

55%

5%

Don't know/Prefer not to answer
3%

# Behavior Intervention Practices

- Roughly half of BAs reported use of a universal SEB program

  - Significantly more BAs at the elementary level (58%) than secondary (41%) level

- Most common:

  - SWPBS (40%)

  - Second Step (11%)

  - Responsive Classroom (9%)

  - Other: Capturing Kids Hearts, CHAMPS, Character Counts, Conscious Discipline, Good as Gold, MindsUp, School Connect

# Take-Away #3: SEB assessment approaches used by districts and schools vary widely.

- Less than 1 in 10 schools engage in universal screening for SEB concerns

- Most rely on teacher nomination or referral to internal support team

Current vs. Ideal Approaches
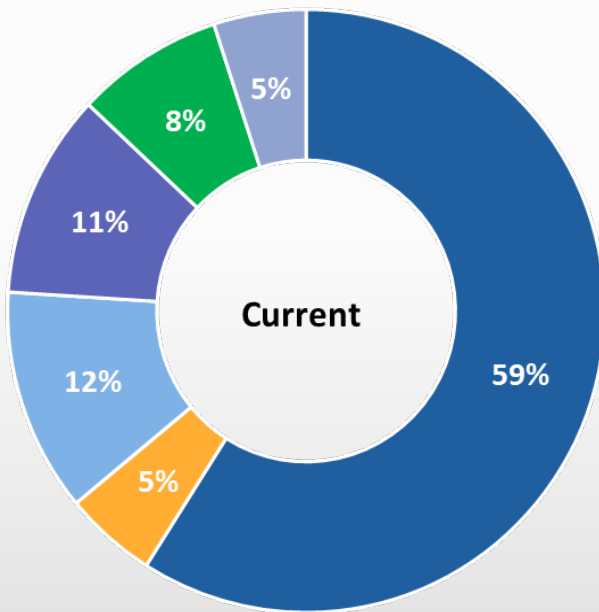
Legend:
- Refer to internal support team to develop intervention plan
- Complete a brief screening measure for all students
- First have familiar adult nominate students and then use screening measures
- Encourage teachers to independently develop and implement an intervention
- Refer students to an outside consultant
- Other (No or Different Approach/Don't Know/Did Not Answer Question)

Current: 59%, 5%, 12%, 11%, 8%, 5%

Ideal: 43%, 35%, 10%, 8%, 4%
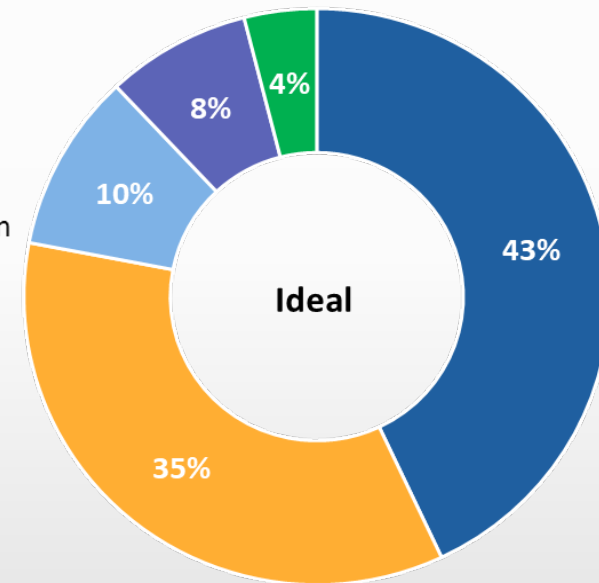
Note: The "Other" responses were not provided options for Ideal Approach

Take-Away #4: Administrators perceive tensions between current and ideal SEB approaches.

- Respondents overwhelming agree that **SEB concerns should be a priority**.

  - Few agreed that these problems are sufficiently addressed by schools.

- Although a small percentage of DAs and BAs report using universal SEB screening, **slightly more than a third report that schools _should_ use universal SEB screenings.**

  - Among DAs, if the current and ideal approach did not match, then **trends supported an ideal approach that was school-based**.

Cross Stakeholder Report

Table 2.
Mean Proportion of Respondents Indicating Schools Should Screen for a Particular Construct.

	DA (%)	BA (%)	SS (%)	T (%)	P (%)
Anxiety/Depression	72	73	82	76	73
Inattentive/ Hyperactive	47	57	72	64	58
Rejected by peers/ socially isolated	73	69	81	71	67
Being aggressive	66	68	74	79	76
Complying with adult expectations	43	50	58	59	61
Having a close relationship with one teacher/ friend	72	65	67	49	50
Having good social or communication skills	58	61	69	55	59
Having a sense of competence	43	47	52	46	51
Experiencing emotional abuse or neglect	72	69	70	82	72
Experiencing physical abuse or neglect	73	70	70	82	77
Experiencing sexual abuse	73	69	70	83	78
Living in a household where abuse occurs	75	68	70	83	75

Take-Away #6: All stakeholder groups strongly support a role for schools in SEB screening.

- District Administrators, School Building Administrators, Student Support Staff, Teachers, and Parents reported similar levels of agreement that schools should screen for

  - The presence of **internalizing** (e.g., depression, rejected by peers) and **externalizing** (e.g., aggression, hyperactivity) concerns (M = 3.58-3.73)

  - The presence of **strengths or personal competencies** (e.g., having strong social skills, a sense of competence) (M = 3.32-3.53)

  - Indicators of **abuse** (e.g., personally experiencing abuse, living in a household where abuse occurs) (M = 3.55-3.76)

Paper 2:
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6. All stakeholder groups strongly support a role for schools in SEB screening.

Paper 3

Sandra Chafouleas, University of Connecticut

(with thanks to the team, and particularly Dakota Cintron)

Rationale

- We hypothesize that school-based SEB practices influence SEB outcomes – but we don't yet actually have a lot of evidence to support these assertions with regard to assessment approaches.

  - E.g. Does engaging in X approach produce better outcomes than Y approach? And what factors influence X approach?

- One area to explore is the influence of school leaders.

  - Literature tells us that school leaders matter, but we don't really know how the role of school leaders might influence school-based SEB practices.

- Thus, the goal of this study was to identify factors that influence school-based SEB practices.

Research Questions

- Does implementation of behavior screening practices predict student outcomes?

  - If so, do practices serve as a partial mediator and moderator for district characteristics, perceived usability, and behavior curricula practices?

Data Sources

2013: Nationally Representative Survey Data from District Administrators in US Public Schools

2013-2014: Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)

2013-2014: National Common Core of Data, Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey (NCCD)

2008-2015: Stanford Education Data Archive (SEDA)

Factor	Indicators
District Characteristics (DDC)	% Child Poverty, % Non-white, % Free-lunch
Perceptions of Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Problems (PSEB)	32a – Student SEB Problems are a concern, 32c – Addressing student SEB problems should be a priority, and 32d – Including SEB screening procedures is an important step toward addressing these problems at school
District URP (DURP)	Mean Knowledge, Mean Willingness, and Mean Feasibility
Behavioral Assessment Practice (BAP)	S310 (No approach, ER, IR, FASA)
Behavioral Programming Practice (BPP)	S23a - Has your district adopted a universal program or programs for addressing social, emotional, and behavioral well-being at **elementary** levels? S23f - Has your district adopted a universal program or programs for addressing social, emotional, and behavioral well-being at **secondary** levels?
District Academic Outcomes (DAO)	Average Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR), Mean ELA 8, Mean Math 8
District Behavioral Outcomes (DBO)	% Absenteeism, % ISS, % MOSS, % SOOS

Measurement model demonstrated tenable model fit:
CFI – 0.954, TLI – 0.939, SRMR – 0.050, RMSEA – 0.051
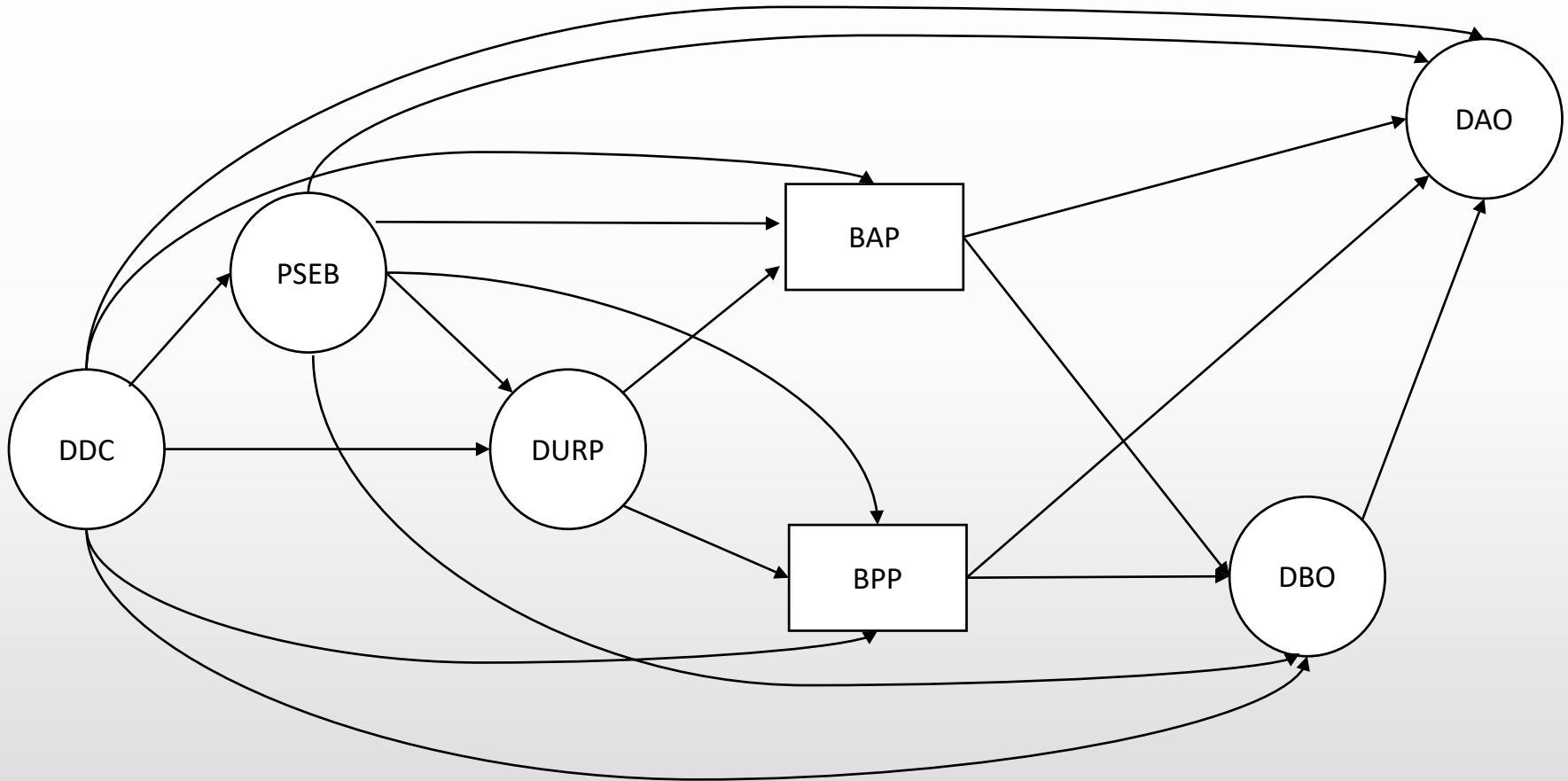
Final Model
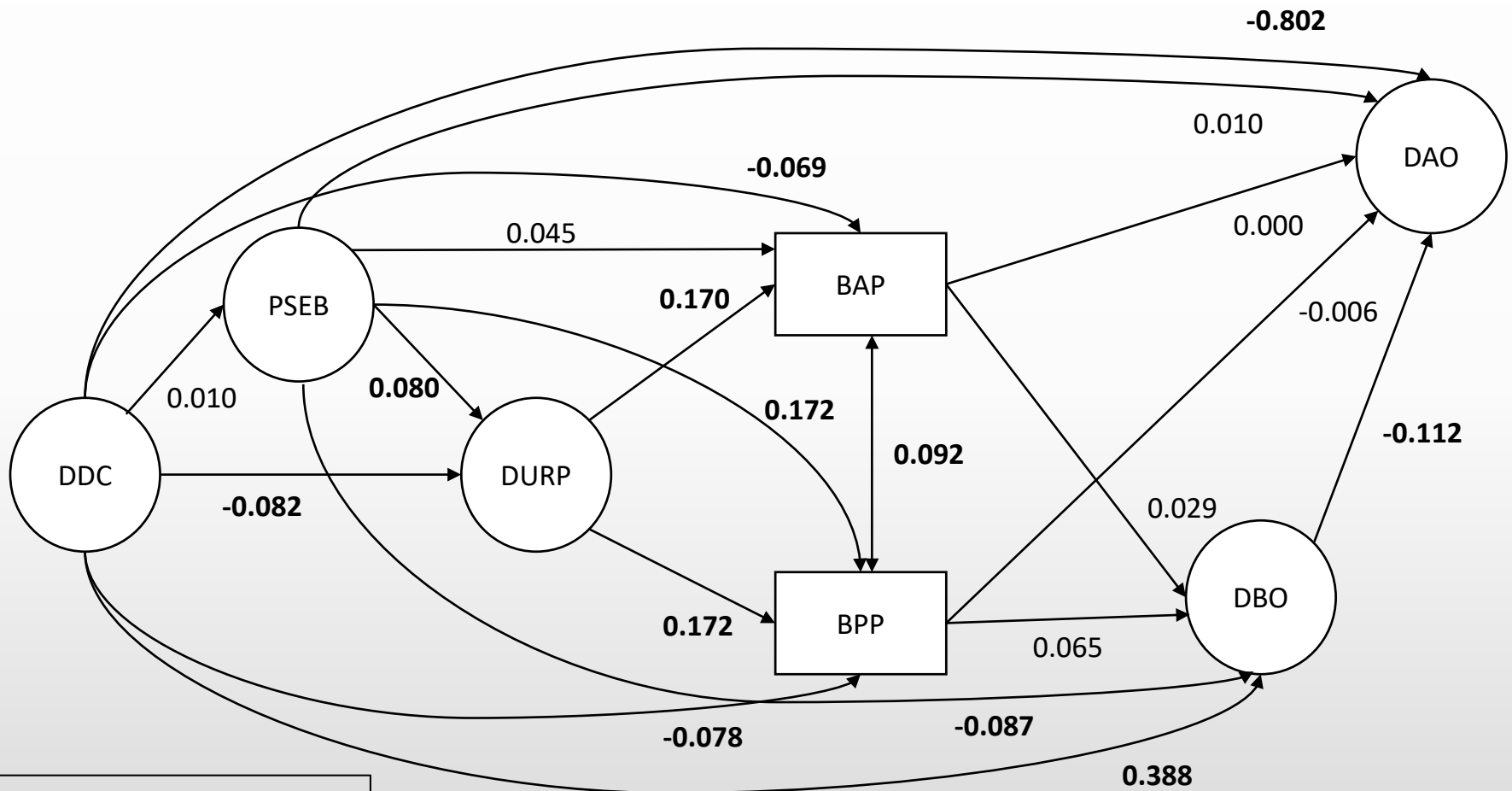
Conceptual Model
- Tenable Model Fit
- Standardized Coefficients with p < 0.01 Bolded

	DDC	PSEB	DURP	DAO	DBO
DDC	1				
PSEB	0.010	1			
DURP	-0.080	0.080	1		
DAO	-0.844	0.008	0.082	1	
DBO	0.380	-0.070	-0.002	-0.418	1

Notes. Factor correlations from measurement model

Take-Away #5: Knowledge and beliefs may have an important role in directions for SEB services.

- Our hypothesized model was that contextually usable behavior assessment might lead to better decisions about behavior supports, which would then lead to better outcomes.

- BUT, our *initial results* are suggesting there is more to the story about predictors of outcomes

  - District demographics most certainly are highly predictive

  - Yet perceptions of SEB as a concern and priority and knowledge, willingness, and feasibility of SEB screening approaches also play a role

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NEEDs²

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Discussant

Rebecca Blanton, Georgia Department of Education Project Coordinator

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Contact

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