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Comparing Stakeholder Beliefs Regarding Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Screening Practices

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INTRODUCTION and PURPOSE

- Around 20% of youth struggle with social, emotional, and behavioral (SEB) disorders; many of these youth have unmet mental health needs.
- Schools can play a significant role in reducing disparities in service receipt for youth SEB needs, but adoption of SEB prevention and intervention programs depends on influences at the classroom, school, district, and community-level.
- There is a need to understand stakeholder perceptions of student SEB needs across these levels of influence, particularly around screening.
- The purpose of this study was to compare stakeholders': 1) understanding and beliefs regarding SEB problems; and 2) opinions regarding school approaches to identify students at risk for SEB challenges.

METHOD

- Between December 2015-2016, stakeholders from a sample of districts across the US (N=1,330) completed a two-part online survey:
 - Part one addressed knowledge (e.g., understanding of options for assessing SEB problems in schools) and beliefs (e.g., student SEB problems are a concern) regarding general SEB problems and SEB screening.
 - Part two asked stakeholders whether they believed that specific behaviors/characteristics should be included in school-based screenings.
 - Respondents also answered one question regarding the approach they personally believed schools should take to identify student SEB needs.
- A sample of 88 school districts included representation from all five stakeholder groups.
- Two sets of analyses were completed:
 - The first focused on identifying whether stakeholders significantly differed in their reported understanding and beliefs about SEB problems. ANOVAs with post-hoc comparisons corrected for multiple comparisons were conducted.
 - The second used ANOVA to determine whether there were significant differences between stakeholders' opinions of which behaviors or characteristics should be included in school screenings.

RESULTS

- Student Support Staff (M = 4.37) reported significantly higher levels of understanding of the scope of SEB problems than the other four groups (i.e. DA = 4.05, BA = 4.02, T = 3.80, P = 3.84).
- District Administrators (M = 3.83) and Student Support Personnel (M = 4.12) reported significantly higher levels of understanding of the options for addressing SEB problems than teachers (M = 3.48) and parents (M = 3.50).
- Parents' reported beliefs about SEB problems (M = 4.12) were significantly lower than those of the other four groups (i.e. DA = 4.47, BA = 4.42, SS = 4.61, T = 4.50).
- Although statistically significant differences were identified across stakeholder groups with regard to reported beliefs about whether schools should screen for indicators of psychopathology [F(4,433) = 2.84, p = .02], competence [F(4,433) = 4.20, p = .002], and abuse [F(4,433) = 3.28, p = .01], none of the post-hoc comparisons were found to be statistically significant when accounting for multiple comparisons.
 - Select examples of categories for which stakeholder discrepancies were identified are presented in Table 2

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

Table 1.
Stakeholder Reports of Ideal Approach to SEB Risk Identification.

	District Administrator (%)	Building Administrator (%)	Student Support Staff (%)	Teachers (%)	Parents (%)
Refer students externally	3.40	2.27	3.49	6.15	7.13
Refer students to internal support team	26.10	38.64	36.05	40.26	26.32
Encourage teachers to independently develop interventions	14.80	7.95	8.14	6.20	10.27
Universal screening	43.20	40.34	43.02	35.66	39.15
Targeted screening of nominated students	11.40	10.80	9.30	11.74	12.13
Missing	1.10	--	--	--	5.00

DISCUSSION

- Overall, stakeholders agreed that schools should engage in practices to identify student SEB risk.
- Across stakeholders, the most commonly endorsed approaches to identification of student SEB risk were 1) universal screening and 2) referring students to an internal support team.
 - Over 25% of respondents from each stakeholder group endorsed both approaches.
- Student Support Staff (e.g., school psychologists, counselors, social workers) reported understanding the causes of SEB problems at significantly greater levels than all other stakeholders.
- Parent respondents reported significantly lower beliefs about student SEB problems than all other stakeholders.
- Based on these results, notable discrepancies exist across stakeholder knowledge of and beliefs about both the origins of and options to address student SEB problems.

For more information on this study and others conducted as part of the NEEDS² project, including briefs of results, methodology, and more, please visit: <http://www.needs2.education.uconn.edu/>

Acknowledgement: Preparation of this poster was supported by a grant from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), U.S. Department of Education (R305A140543). Please direct all correspondence to the PI: Sandra Chafouleas at sandra.chafouleas@uconn.edu