



# National Exploration of Emotional/Behavioral Detection in School Screening Project

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## ISSUE BRIEF NO. 7

### Stakeholders' Knowledge and Beliefs about Supporting Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Health in Schools

#### Background

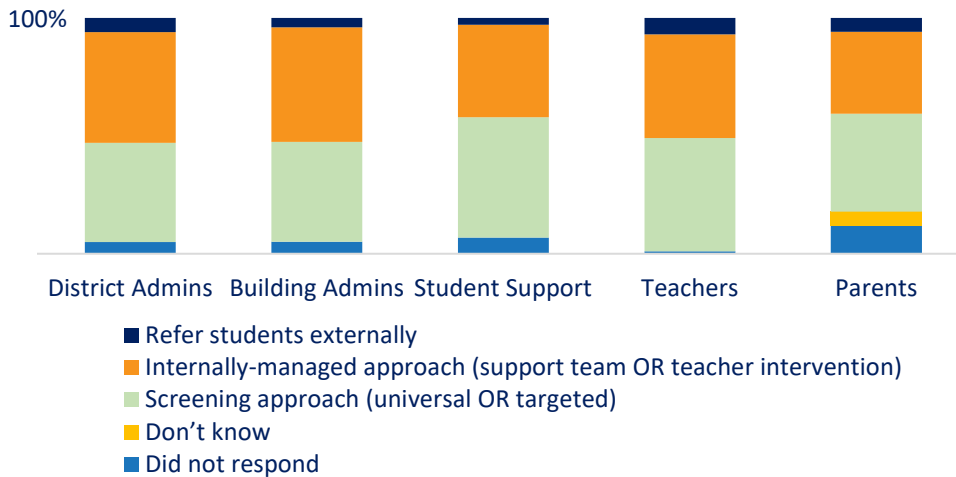
Approximately one in five children and adolescents struggle with mental health disorders.<sup>1</sup> The earlier that children who are at risk for social emotional and behavioral (SEB) problems can be identified, the less likely that they will experience negative outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Universal screening, which involves assessing all students in a school to identify SEB concerns, is one approach that experts have recommended in order to identify students proactively. Schools are in a unique position to identify and support these students early on, yet studies have suggested that not many schools are conducting this type of screening.<sup>3</sup>

In the Fall of 2016, a team of researchers from the University of Connecticut and Northeastern University set out to find out about stakeholders' knowledge and opinions with regard to school-based approaches to identifying and supporting students at risk of SEB challenges. The team conducted an online survey of district administrators, school building administrators, school support staff, teachers, and parents within 1330 public school districts across the United States.<sup>4</sup>

#### Findings

- **All stakeholders reported strong agreement that student SEB problems are a concern** that needs to be addressed. This belief was the strongest, however, among student support personnel (e.g. school counselors, psychologists, social workers) and in larger school districts.
- The **highest levels of understanding of SEB problems were reported by student support personnel** whereas the lowest were reported by parents. Overall, stakeholders reported having a better understanding of how SEB problems impact student success than what can be done to prevent and treat them.
- The majority of respondents agreed that **schools should definitely screen for internalizing behaviors (e.g., anxiety, depression), aggressive/violent behaviors, and risk factors such as whether a student had experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse**. Stakeholders reported less confidence regarding whether schools should screen for indicators of student competence or resilience (e.g., having a belief that life will work out well).
- The majority of stakeholders believed that **responsibility for identifying and addressing SEB problems should fall to the school** as opposed to something that should be referred externally. Student support personnel, teachers, and parents were somewhat more likely to endorse the use of universal or targeted screening, whereas administrators were somewhat more likely to say that students should be referred to an internal support team or that teachers should develop interventions.

## In general, which of the described approaches do you think schools should take to identifying and supporting the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students?



(Parents were the only group presented with an “I don’t know” option.)

### Implications

Findings show that stakeholders share concern about student SEB problems and believe that schools should play a proactive role in identifying and intervening with such problems. Universal screening in particular was endorsed by the majority of stakeholders to proactively identify students struggling with a range of SEB challenges. Although there were differences in a preferred ideal approach to SEB problems, stakeholders largely recognized the important role that schools can play.

### For Additional Information

Briesch, A.M., Cintron, D.W., Dineen, J.N., Chafouleas, S. M., McCoach, D. B., & Auerbach, E. (2019). Comparing Stakeholders’ Knowledge and Beliefs About Supporting Students’ Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Health in Schools. *School Mental Health, 12*, 222-238.

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. (2011). *Mental health: A state of well-being*. Geneva: World Health Organization.

<sup>2</sup> Bradley, R., Doolittle, J., & Bartolotta, R. (2008). Building on the data and adding to the discussion: The experiences and outcomes of students with emotional disturbance. *Journal of Behavioral Education, 17*, 4–23.

<sup>3</sup> Dineen, J. N., Chafouleas, S. M., Briesch, A. M., McCoach, D. B., Newton, S. D., & Cintron, D. W. (2020). *Exploring Approaches to Identifying and Supporting Students’ Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Needs in U.S. Public School Districts*. Manuscript under review.

<sup>4</sup> All survey responses were collected between 12/2015 and 12/2016. Although 1330 district administrators responded to the initial survey, participation from the other four stakeholder groups was highly variable across districts. See Marcy, H.M., Dineen, J. N., McCoach, D. B., Chafouleas, S.M., & Briesch, A.M. (2018, December) The NEEDs2 Project: Project Methodology.

Issue Brief No. 7 was created by the NEEDs<sup>2</sup> Project.



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