4F - Is it Me or the Environment? Equity Considerations for Social-Emotional-Behavioral Screening

Presenters:
- Ruthie Payno-Simmons, Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center, Indiana University
- Jeff Chenier, The Willow School New Orleans (LA)

• Topic: Equity, Schoolwide, Social-Emotional-Behavioral Well-Being
• Keywords: Behavior, Climate, Screening, Youth Voice, Outcome, Responsive School Environments

Throughout the session, when you see slides like this, we will collectively say...

Is it me, or is it the environment?

Let’s Practice
When Working In Your Team

Consider 4 Questions

- How does this compare to our priorities?
- What team would oversee this work?
- What should we stop doing to make room for this work?
- How will we assess whether it’s (a) implemented well and (b) working?

Objectives

- Recognize challenges in existing SEB screening efforts.
- Understand bias and the overrepresentation of discipline decisions of Black and Brown students and students with disabilities.
- Discuss six guiding principals for centering equity in the SEB screening process to mitigate harm for all, especially those often overrepresented in harmful discipline practices.
- Hear from a district working to center equity in their SEB Process.

Today’s Facilitators

- Ruthie Payno-Simmons, Ph.D., Associate Director of Partnerships, Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center, Indiana University Indianapolis
- Jeff Chenier, Ph.D., Director of Student Support Services, Willow School New Orleans (LA)
National PBIS Leadership Forum

The Willow School, a National Blue Ribbon School in partnership with Tulane University, offers a unique K-12 program that inspires imagination and academic curiosity. Our renowned arts-integrated academic program engages students and challenges them to think critically, analytically, and creatively.

Our core values of kindness, respect, responsibility, and hard work are the basic tenets of our K-12 program. We are a school that fosters the social-emotional development of our students with our Caring Counts, Advisory, and Wellness programs.

Willow School Points of Pride

- Highest performing K-12 school in Louisiana.
- Louisiana Department of Education “A” school.
- Named one of America’s Best High Schools 2022 (U.S. News & World Report).
- $30 million in scholarships. Class of 2022 – 170 grads accepted into 242 colleges and universities in 44 states and four countries.
- One of the first schools to receive the honor of a five-year designation as an Exemplary Arts School from the Arts Schools Network.
- Designated a No Place for Hate School by the Anti-Defamation League.

Willow School Demographics

The school staff includes a total of 204 employees, including 112 full-time teachers, 6 counselors or social workers, a school psychologist, 14 school site administrators, and five executive-level administrators.

The student population is 58% White, 21% Black, 9% Latine, 4% Asian, 7% two or more races, and 1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

The special education population is 5%, most of which are classified as autism or speech/language impairment.

There are five students enrolled in ESL program.

Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Screening

In the COVID Era

Many school systems use SEB screening as a proactive way of supporting students.

Due to COVID-19, there is a heightened focus on students’ mental health (Sullivan et al., 2021).

Schools feel the need to understand whether students need social and emotional support.

There is a need for schools to do SEB wellness checks to be able to identify and address internalizing and externalizing behaviors.
Let's look at some mental health data.

- In 2021,
  - More than 4 in 10 (42%) students felt persistently sad or hopeless.
  - Nearly one-third (39%) experienced poor mental health.
  - More than 1 in 5 (22%) students seriously considered attempting suicide and 1 in 10 (10%) attempted suicide.
- In 2021,
  - 10% of high school students attempted suicide one or more times during the past year.
  - Female students were more likely than male students to attempt suicide.
  - Black students were more likely than Asian, Hispanic, and White students to attempt suicide.
  - LGBTQ+ students and students who had same-sex partners were more likely than their peers to attempt suicide.

School Connectedness

In 2021, 61% of high school students felt a sense of school connectedness, measured by agreeing or strongly agreeing that they felt close to people at school.

- Male students were more likely than female students to feel close to people at school.
- White students were more likely than students from most other racial and ethnic groups to feel close to people at school.
- Heterosexual students and students who had only opposite-sex partners were more likely than their peers to feel close to people at school.
Is it me, or is it the environment?

Screening is the process of proactively screening students in a building or setting in order to understand needs in a given domain (Center on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, n.d.).

There are diverse constructs that screening methods capture such as:

- Prosocial Behaviors
- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social Awareness
- Relationships
- Responsible Decision-making
- Social-emotional Competencies
- Social, Emotional, And Academic Behaviors
- Behavior Concerns
- Adaptive Skills
- Emotional Problems
- Conduct Problems
- Hyperactivity
- Peer Problems
- Externalizing And Internalizing Behaviors

Defining Terms

- These are behaviors that are directed outward and are observable by others.
- Examples of externalizing behaviors include aggression, defiance, hyperactivity, and conduct problems.
- Children or individuals with externalizing behaviors may act out their difficulties, and their challenges are more apparent to those around them.

Externalizing Behaviors

- These are behaviors that are directed inward, often not immediately visible to others.
- Examples of internalizing behaviors include anxiety, depression, withdrawal, and somatic complaints.
- Children or individuals displaying internalizing behaviors may keep their distress or emotional difficulties to themselves.

Internalizing Behaviors

Challenges in existing SEB screening efforts

- Use of screening tools in isolation from the larger systemic equity-centered multitiered system of support.
- Commonly used screening methods of using office discipline referrals (ODRs) and internal referrals from teachers. Over-reliance on reactive indicators (ODRs, teacher referrals).
- Over-identification marginalization of racially minoritized youth.
- Pervasive systemic racial bias linked to inequitable school discipline (Skiba 2010).
- The lack of parent/caregiver and student voice.

Screening methods that rely on reactive indicators based on educators’ responses to problematic behavior are subject to biases and can lead to future discipline disparities (Miller, Murphy, & Sullivan, 2022).

Teachers and educators embody attitudes, beliefs, and expectations that often increase deficit thinking by placing the onus of underperforming and underachieving onto students and families who do not adhere to dominant norms of thinking, acting, being, and feeling (Garcia & Guerra, 2004).

When systemic errors, such as bias, exist, the validity of screening tools or behavior rating scales is compromised, especially amongst students from differing races, ethnicities, and cultures (Mason, Gunersel & Ney, 2013).
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SEB Screening and Common Challenges

Stressors associated with COVID have contributed to negative impacts on mental health and well-being, especially among marginalized youth and families already facing pre-existing systemic inequities.

Emphasis on getting screening “right” and ensuring support was available for ALL students.

Identifying wrong students with wrong measures

Prior to current programming, screening was driven by teacher nomination and pre-existing data reviews.

Explore bias and the overrepresentation of discipline decisions of Black and Brown students and students with dis/abilities.

(US Department of Education, 2022; Children’s Defense Fund, 1975)
Is it me, or is it the environment?

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National Data on Days of Lost Instruction Due to Out Of School Suspensions

Nationally, school children lost over 11 million days of instruction (11,360,004) as a result of out-of-school suspension. That's roughly 66 million hours of missed instruction or more than 63,000 school years of lost learning.

(Losen & Whitaker 2018)
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National Data: Days of Lost Instruction Per 100 Students by Race And Disability in 2015-16

The graph shows that, nationally, Black students lost 66 days of instruction compared to just 14 days for White students. This difference of 52 more days lost for Blacks than Whites means that Blacks lost nearly 5 times the amount of instruction as Whites and nearly 17 times the amount lost by Asian American students who at 4 days per 100, lost the lowest amount of instruction of any of the racial/ethnic groups.

Similarly profound disparities are observed between students with and without disabilities. The former lost 44 days of instruction, which was more than double the loss experienced by their non-disabled peers (20 days per 100).

Prevailing Deficit Assumptions about Disproportionate Educational Outcomes

Poverty plays a role, but racial disproportionality remains, even when controlling for poverty.
- Anyon et al., 2014
- Skiba et al., 2002; 2005
- Wallace et al., 2008

Family: Hattie’s (2008) synthesis revealed that the effect sizes of what schools and teachers do are much higher than the external at-risk factors students might face.

Black & Brown students do not act out more than their white peers. However, they are disciplined more than other student groups for the same and more subjective reasons (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Losen & Skiba, 2010).

What would happen if we included students with disabilities and their parents/caregivers in the design of learning spaces and decision-making?

(Payno-Simmons 2017)

Harmful/Oppressive Practices

Scripting refers to how the identities of CLDS are socially constructed within schools when ideas, beliefs, and mental representations of social interactions become habituated forms of reality that are practiced within social systems.

Scapegoating in schools is a consequence of scripting. Students who do not fit the dominant narrative are characterized as inferior, hopeless, misunderstood, treated unfairly, picked on, singled out, disconnected, and beside themselves with disbelief, and as if they could do nothing.

The Pencil Incident Example of scripting, scapegoating, and making majors out of minors: Students shared feeling angry, sad, frustrated, unliked, right, silenced, hopeless, misunderstood, treated unfairly, picked on, single out, disconnected, and beside themselves with disbelief, and as if they could do nothing.

Majors out of Minor occur when CLDS are frequently referred to the office for minor behaviors that should be managed by staff.

(Payno-Simmons 2017)

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Inequitable Learning Conditions

Data collection from Black males and females attending The Willow School

Students can and do access information about systemic inequities and can have the same prevailing assumptions regarding harmful practices they encounter in their own school.

Students not only outwardly voice frustration with repeated negative interactions, but also inwardly are impacted in areas of mental health, academic efficacy, and school connectedness.

Perceived Discrimination as a Predictor

Data collection from Black males and females attending The Willow School

Perceived discrimination is a predictor of academic efficacy, mental health, and school connectedness.

Goodwin, Chen, Long (2021)
Inequitable Learning Conditions Students of Color Experience

Activity – Wow and wonder
- Review the systemic inequities
- Turn & talk with a partner and take turns sharing one wow and wonder
- Whole Group: Wow & wonder share out

Conditions in Which Black & Brown Students Learn

"When instructional methods privilege cultural and language practices, knowledge, and abilities of dominant groups, they become barriers for students' learning and participation, and tools for assimilation to dominant school cultures (Waitoller & Thorius, 2015)."

PST Meetings at The Willow School

Substitute teacher removed from High School after making racist comment toward Black student
Is it me, or is it the environment?

6 Guiding Principles for Centering Equity in the SEB Screening Process to Mitigate Harm

Educational Equity

Occurs when educational policies, practices, interactions, and resources are representative of, constructed by, and responsive to all people so that each individual has access to, meaningfully participates in, and has positive outcomes from high-quality learning experiences, regardless of individual characteristics and group memberships.

(Fraser, 2008; Great Lakes Equity Center, 2012)
6 Guiding Principles for Centering Equity in SEB Screening

1. Identify the Focus of Screening Efforts
2. Ensure Appropriate Use
3. Consider Contextual Appropriateness
4. Leverage Collaboration
5. Adopt a Comprehensive and Integrated Approach
6. Engage in Ongoing Equity-focused PD

Guiding Principle 1. Identify the Focus of Screening Efforts

- Because there is a diverse landscape of universal social, emotional, and behavioral screening methods that capture different constructs, administrators and leadership teams must
  - Base SEB screening on shared goals within the school context.
  - Critically question “what are we screening for?”
  - Consider ecological factors and link assessed constructs to decision-making and support services within an equity-centered model.

Guiding Principle 2. Ensure Appropriate Use

- Use the right tool: Remember, screening tools are made for specific reasons.
- The focus of the screening should guide which tool is chosen, ensuring the data collected are useful for the people using the tool and those who made it.
- The information collected from screening can be helpful in:
  - Evaluating the sufficiency of programs and practices.
  - Identifying student SEB support needs.
  - Enhancing equity by better understanding student populations in certain programs is not serving well.
  - Assisting in administrative decisions surrounding resource needs and allocation.
  - Supporting school improvement efforts.
- Screening helps schools understand how well they are supporting students in their social, emotional, and behavioral needs.
Guiding Principle 3. Consider Contextual Appropriateness

- Context Matters in Screening:
  - Equity-centered screening ensures methods align with the school and community context.
  - Consider risk factors like poverty and racism, avoiding approaches that overlook these issues and may perpetuate inequities.

- Addressing Systemic Issues:
  - Acknowledges that screening practices need to intentionally address risk factors and exposures that impact students and communities, such as poverty and racism.
  - Highlights the risk of perpetuating oppressive systems if screening approaches ignore these contextual issues, leading to mischaracterizations of students and exacerbating disparities in school systems.

- Enhancing Contextual Appropriateness:
  - Schools should understand the challenges and needs of a community in screening practices.
  - Screening should go beyond identification for interventions, connecting students and families to needed services to enhance opportunity, access, and overall well-being.

Guiding Principle 4. Leverage Collaboration

- Homes, schools, and communities to work together.
- Using a connected systems approach, bringing in mental health, community, school, and family partners to make collaboration better and get better results.
- Combining resources from different places can be a strong way to support everyone. Also, involving families early on is key to making sure the screening fits well, gets everyone’s approval, and has a bigger impact.
Identifying the Focus of Screening Efforts Continued

- Created Mental Health and Wellness subcommittee of the school’s MTSS team
  - At that time, the guiding principle was to embrace and address, using a multi-tiered model, the VERY REAL social/emotional/behavioral needs of students occurring at our school and in our community.
- Identified community partners (LSU and Tulane School Psychology Programs) to support with ensuring efforts are grounded in research-based and culturally relevant practices.
- Identified focus areas for screening results to impact:
  - Mental health awareness/intervention for staff and students, facility, staff wellbeing, staff/student relationships, school website, advisory program, school structures.

Guiding Principle 5. Adopt a Comprehensive and Integrated Approach

- SEB screening should not happen in isolation.
- Integrated SEB screening within an equity-centered Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) or similar equity initiatives to consider various aspects of student functioning and the broader environment, moving away from centering attributions solely on the student’s behavior.
Evidence of Improved Discipline Outcomes of PBIS

**REduced**
- Use of exclusionary discipline
  - Bradshaw et al., 2009; Haynie et al., 2004; Gage et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2005
- Racial inequities in discipline
  - Fox et al., 2021; Gion et al., 2020; McIntosh et al., 2018; McIntosh et al., 2021; McIntosh et al., in press
- Bullying and exclusion
  - Anastasi et al., 2012
- Teacher burnout and stress
  - Kelm & McIntosh, 2012; Ross & Horner, 2006; Ross et al., 2012

**IMPROVED**
- Prosocial behavior
  - Metzler, Biglan, Rusby, & Sprague, 2001; Nelson et al., 2002
- Emotional regulation
  - Bradshaw et al., 2012
- Academic achievement
  - Angus & Nelson, 2021; Horner et al., 2009; Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006; Nelson et al., 2002
- School climate & school safety
  - Horner et al., 2009; McIntosh et al., 2021
- Organizational health
  - Bradshaw et al., 2008

Compiled by McIntosh 2022, ReACT
Key Practices for Centering Equity in the PBIS Systems

- Include and disaggregate systemic data on curriculum, instruction, PBIS, culture & climate, early childhood, gifted & talented programming, etc.
- Five Critical Questions During SWIS Drill Down
  - Name the inequities that show up in your systems
  - Action plan to disrupt those inequities
  - Engage multiple and diverse perspectives in systems work
- Disaggregate All Data by Student Group
  - Ongoing critical self-reflection and examination for bias, unfairness, cultural mismatch
  - Building positive relationships
  - Leveraging the 4 to 1 positive to negative ratio, neutralizing routines, fair investigations, positive greeting at the door etc.
- High Expectations
  - The Willow School
  - Embedding SEB practices in an Equity-centered MTSS Framework

Support Educators through Equity-focused PD

- High fit to equity
  - Strategies, coaching, modeling, feedback
  - Asset ideas and practices
  - Critical consciousness (identity, power, privilege, implicit bias)
  - Critical language awareness
  - Cautiously examine self and systems

- Book studies and application opportunities
- Affinity Group Opportunities

Adapt Practices
- Be Responsive to Needs and Values

- Equity-centered
  - Avoided extant data sources which excludes student voice and frames SEB concerns as a discipline problem
  - Cautious around screening measure choice, as measures may reference culture-specific constructs that communities view as stigmatizing
  - Review with staff rater bias and whether screening measures are equitable and culturally sound

Benefits
- Student voice and input is at the heart of our practice
- Correct measure selection is another benefit of an equity-centered framework
- Continued professional development and growth
### The Willow School: SEB Screening Process Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Screened – Student Completed</th>
<th>How Does this Practice Center Equity?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>Ability to analyze data for different groups of students’ perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past or current mental health treatment</td>
<td>Provide services to students who are currently not receiving services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellbeing</td>
<td>Student-rated areas of connectedness to learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalizing behavior</td>
<td>Students measure inwardly directed behaviors in context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Student measure outwardly directed behaviors in context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symptoms impact</td>
<td>Measure student appraisal of whether identified problems affect their functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help seeking</td>
<td>Appraisal of whether students would use services or trust in services school is offering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived discrimination</td>
<td>School culture measurement over time based on student input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School climate</td>
<td>Measuring connectedness and sense of student safety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### The Willow School: SEB Screening Process Framework Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Screened – Teacher Completed</th>
<th>How Does this Practice Center Equity?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nomination At-risk for a social/emotional/behavior challenge (SEB/C)</td>
<td>Are students missing from student-completed measures?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School climate</td>
<td>Progress monitoring of programming as a response of repeated completion of climate scales</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### The Willow School: Beyond Focusing on Students to Addressing the Environment (Tier I)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Related Elements to Tier Programming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Reconnection to traditional classroom, connect abstract content to world applications and understandings, create opportunities for shared student led learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Create strategies with students to increase cognitive engagement in order to encourage critical thinking and scholastic leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>Increase the implementation of mixed instructional approaches and meaningful classroom activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>Engage the educational team in ongoing professional development to ensure school culture measurement is maintained.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### National PBIS Leadership Forum

10/26/23
The Willow School: Beyond Focusing on Students to Addressing the Environment (Tier I)

Microaggressions

TWS may benefit from professional development training for teachers on recognizing and knowing how to respond to microaggressions and intentional/unintentional discrimination. Training should target a range of microaggressions, including gender identity, race, physical appearance, and learning/developmental disability status as these were highlighted among the most prevalent reasons for student experience with discrimination. Regarding peer-to-peer experiences of mistreatment, TWS may consider providing instruction about anti-bullying, including bystander and empathetic responding, microaggressions, and individual differences.

School Climate

Consider school-wide practices to address and prevent bullying behaviors, such as school-wide PBIS, SEL, and targeted bullying intervention. Additionally, small group support or individual counseling may be beneficial at Tier 2 and 3 level to support students who are more directly involved in bullying or victimization. Additional assessments may help to further understand student perceptions of the fairness of rules at TWS. These may include additional surveys or focus groups of teachers and students to better understand why rules may be perceived as unfair. This additional assessment may reveal whether particular populations of students feel rules are unfairly applied across various groups of students.

A clear anti-bullying policy, which is consistently enforced by school staff, may help to prevent bullying. Given the ever-increasing role of technology in students’ lives, discussions of digital citizenship may help to prevent cyberbullying. It is possible that students feel certain rules are inconsistently enforced across school settings (e.g., hallways vs. in class) or across school staff members. Consistency in implementing behavioral support strategies that are culturally responsive is essential for promoting a positive school climate and for promoting equity among students.

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The Willow School: Beyond Focusing on Students to Addressing the Environment (Tier I)

Wellbeing

Consider opportunities to enhance student emotional engagement, such as providing opportunities for classroom dialogue to encourage relationship building among students and with the teacher.

Discuss and co-create strategies with students to increase cognitive engagement in order to encourage critical thinking and schoolwork completion. For example, elicit feedback for class assignments on what is working and what could improve, intersperse hard tasks with easy ones, connect abstract content to real-world applications and understandings, and create opportunities for shared student-led learning.

Guiding Principle 6. Engage in Ongoing Equity-focused Professional Development

- Align PD to equity efforts.
- Provide individual coaching, modeling & feedback.
- Define educational equity.
- Asset ideas and practices
- Critical consciousness (identity, power, privilege, implicit bias)
- Critical language awareness
- Critically examine self and systems
- Socio-historical context
- Affinity group opportunities

The school has met several milestones on this journey:
- Understanding Community and DEI
- Understanding and Gathering Input on Creating Global DEI Statement & Community Design
- Understanding What Equity Looks Like
- Equity in Schools and the Classroom
- DEI Audit (In Progress)

The Willow School Equity-focused Professional Learning Plan

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging is not a task with a deadline but a journey.

JDR & Mason are currently assisting with our second-to-last milestone, Community-wide DEI Audit. In addition to policy reviews, they are conducting group and one-on-one interviews.

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10/27/2023
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