**Questions to Consider when Selecting a Universal Screener**



**What is universal screening?** Within the context of Response to Intervention or three tiered approach to School Wide Positive Behavior Support, universal screening is the first step in identifying the students who are at risk for behavioral or mental health difficulties. The purpose of screens is to predict a future outcome (e.g. behavioral difficulties). Universal screening is conducted on a school-wide basis and typically involves several levels of assessment to avoid over- or under- identification of students (Minke, 2012). Screenings typically involve the use of brief, inexpensive tools that can identify characteristics that are predictive of future difficulties such as behavior or social emotional problems.

**Why consider the use of universal screening for behavior?** Screening to identify at-risk students for developing behavior problems offers several advantages. Universal screening is preventative. Schools offer immediate assistance to those students who, despite a strong Tier 1 program, are at risk for behavioral and social-emotional difficulties. Attending to student social emotional and behavioral needs early via screening has been shown to improve academic outcomes, promote positive school climates, and improve interpersonal relationships (Walker & Shinn, 2002).

**Is my school ready to do this? Prepare.**

* What are your district policies and resources related to screening?
* Does your school have an effective school wide program that is working well for 80-85% of students?
* Is your problem-solving team functioning well or overwhelmed?
* What in-school resources are available to provide interventions?
* Does your district have effective connections with community support services?

**What information does your team hope to gain from screening? Build a foundation.**  
Universal screenings within an RTI framework are intended to identify students who are (a) typically developing children/adolescents, (b) those with elevated risk, and (c) those with persistent problems. Risk may be identified based on negative outcomes (i.e. poor academic performance, emotional or behavioral maladjustment), or based on protective factors (i.e. developmental assets). ***Perhaps the most critical step in selecting a screening tool is to gain consensus among stakeholders regarding which indicators your school personnel and community agree are important.***

**How do you intend to use the screening measure? Clarify your goals.**

* Decide who to screen: does not have to include all students. A school may wish to choose groups strategically (e.g. all kindergarteners, all students during transition year to middle school/high school, all transfers into school).
* Decide when to screen: as a singular event or completed periodically throughout the school year.
* Decide what to screen for: specific behaviors/disorders (i.e. internalizing versus externalizing behavior problems); social competencies (i.e. social skills); student adherence to school-wide expectations; progress with school wide social emotional curriculum (i.e. Second Step).
* Decide who will oversee the screening procedures and at what level you intend to intervene (Tier 1 or Tier 2?).**Logistical and Data Considerations**

**What are elements of effective universal screening measures?**  When selecting a universal screening, the school based team should consider the *appropriateness*, *technical adequacy* and *usability* of the screening tool. See Glover and Albers (2007) for a user-friendly summary.   
 *Appropriateness*: Consider whether or not the screening measure matches the needs of the school population, is compatible with the school’s delivery model (frequency of screening; outcomes are consistent with goals) and is validated by research for intended screening purposes.

*Technical Adequacy:*

* Consider the normative sample. Either local or national norms may be used with screening assessments. The normative sample should be representative, recent and of sufficient size.
* Review validity and determine the degree to which the assessment measures what it is intended to measure. Review the predictive, concurrent, construct and content validity of the screening tool.
* Review reliability and determine the degree to which the assessment produces stable and consistent results. Review the internal consistency, test-retest reliability and inter-rater reliability of the tool.

*Usability:* A screening tool will not be helpful for identifying individual risk unless it is practical to administer within a given context. The team should review the following six considerations when determining usability: (1) cost must not outweigh benefits; (2) administration should be feasible; (3) the screening instrument should be acceptable to multiple stakeholders; (4) system for collecting, managing, and interpreting screening assessment data; (5) appropriate accommodations available for the targeted population; (6) information aids in improving student outcomes.

**How will you gain consent?** Determine practices regarding informed consent. Review active versus passive consent. Parents have the right to inspect all instructional materials and to refuse testing and treatment (see Hatch Amendment [1974]; Pupil Personnel Rights Amendment [2002]). At minimum, parents should be clearly informed about the screening, confidentiality, and follow up procedures for students who are identified at risk. When in doubt, choose active consent.

**What are the costs associated with universal screening procedures?** The cost of a screening instrument must not outweigh the benefits. Consider whether or not the screening will place unreasonable burden on human or financial resources. Ensure the benefits are evident as screening may take away from instructional time and/or require additional personnel. Consider the resources in place for servicing students who are identified as at-risk, while weighing the cost of not identifying those in need of services.

**What are the professional development needs associated with your chosen screening method?** All key stakeholders and staff will require training surrounding implementation and general screening information. Training must include information in behavioral and mental health issues that will improve teachers’ understanding of the purpose of screening, confidentiality and address potential concerns/misconceptions.

**How will you use the screening information to inform interventions?** The team must decide at what Tier the screening will inform interventions. If using community sources of data and/or school wide screening, the information may tie back to your universal Tier 1 expectations and associated “Cool Tools.” For example, if you review data and determine the school (as a whole) has more students with internalizing behaviors, you may choose to embed coping strategies for managing stress throughout your school wide matrix. On the other hand, if the data identifies a relatively small group of students demonstrating a high degree of risk, you may choose to focus on more intensive interventions such as Functional Behavior Assessment and Behavior Intervention Plans or targeted small groups.

***Resources:***

Glover, T.A. & Albers, C.A. (2007). Considerations for evaluating universal screening assessments. Journal of School Psychology, 45, 117-135.

Minke, K.M. (July, 2012). Universal screening for social-emotional and behavioral difficulties. Workshop presented at the National Association of School Psychologists summer conference, Minneapolis, MN

Walker, H.M., & Shinn, M.R. (2002). Structuring school-based interventions to achieve integrated primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention goals for safe and effective schools. In M.R. Shinn, H.M. Walker, & G. Stoner (Eds.), Interventions for academic and behavior problems II: Preventative and remedial approaches, (pp. 1-25). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists

Universal Screening for Behavior: Planning Guide



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|  |  | In Place | Partially In Place | Not in Place | Discussion/Follow Up |
| **Prepare** | The school has an effective school wide program that is working well for 80% of students. |  |  |  |  |
| Our problem solving team(s) is/are functioning well and not overwhelmed. |  |  |  |  |
| The school has a variety of in-house resources to provide interventions. |  |  |  |  |
| Our district has effective connections with community support services. |  |  |  |  |

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| **Build a Foundation** |  | In Place | Partially In Place | Not in Place | Discussion/Follow Up |
| District and building level administrative support for universal screening |  |  |  |  |
| Establish universal screening committee consisting of building level administrators, student support personnel, teachers, family and community members. |  |  |  |  |
| Gain consensus from committee members regarding which indicators of social emotional development are important (consider using school wide or community data to generate discussion (e.g. school climate information, attendance rates, homeless rates, incarceration rates, etc.) |  |  |  |  |

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| **Clarify Goals** |  | In Place | Partially In Place | Not in Place | Discussion/Follow Up |
| Identify what information the team hopes to gain from the screening (e.g. risk factors for specific disorders, social competencies, progress with SEL curriculum and/or adherence to school wide expectations). |  |  |  |  |
| Identify when the screening(s) will occur (i.e. 3x) . |  |  |  |  |
| Identify how the team intends to use the screening outcomes (e.g. to guide Tier 1 practices or inform Tier 2 and 3 interventions). |  |  |  |  |
| Identify who to screen (does not have to include all students). |  |  |  |  |
| Determine who will oversee the screening procedures and at what level (e.g. Tier 1 or Tier 2). |  |  |  |  |

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| **Identify Resources and Logistics** |  | In Place | Partially In Place | Not in Place | Discussion/Follow Up |
| Select an effective universal screening measure. |  |  |  |  |
| Identify resources for supporting students via screening (in school or community based). |  |  |  |  |
| Develop a budget for materials, staff, etc. |  |  |  |  |
| Create professional development materials. |  |  |  |  |
| Create a calendar of dates for screening and meetings to share results. |  |  |  |  |
| Create a system for gaining consent. |  |  |  |  |
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A Review of Commonly Used Social and Emotional Screening Tools

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| Existing Screening Tools | | | | | | | | |
|  | Focus Behaviors | | Overarching Structure | |  | | | |
| Name | E | I | Strength-Based | Needs-Based | Content and Use | Advantages | Drawbacks | Cost |
| Office Discipline Referrals  Attendance  Academic Data  Time on Task | X | X | X | X | Embedded Sources of Data | Efficient (information is already available) | Reactive (problems are advanced before identification)  Not systematic (some children are missed)  Will not typically identify students with internalizing problems  Reliability may be weak due to variables such as teacher tolerance for behavior problems and perceived level of support from administration | ------ |
| Key: E= Externalizing Behavior; I=Internalizing Behavior | | | | | | | | |
| Empirical Support and Resources | | | Sugai, G., Sprague, J. R., Horner, R. H., & Walker, H. M. (2000). Preventing school violence: The use of office discipline referrals to assess and monitor schoolwide discipline interventions. Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 8(2), 94-101. | | | | | |

| Published Screening Tools | | | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Focus Behaviors | | Overarching Structure | |  | | | |
| Name | E | I | Strength-Based | Needs-Based | Content and Use | Advantages | Drawbacks | Cost |
| Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders (SSBD) | X | X |  | X | Nominations, rank-ordering on key dimensions, ratings and checklists, direct observations, archival school records, normative comparisons  Elementary aged students  Multiple Gating Procedures | High Accuracy  Well researched  Closely aligns with the three tier service delivery system  Strong reliability and validity  Identifies students who may be under-identified (i.e., students with internalizing behaviors) and/or risk for dropping out of school | Perceived time and expense for administration; lack of long term predictive validity  Limited linkage of screening outcomes to available interventions and supports  Predictive validity should be reviewed  Does not allow for progress monitoring  Student and parent involvement are not included into the stages  Does not allow teachers to identify students who may demonstrate externalizing and internalizing behaviors | Screening 500 students using the SSBD would cost $130  Includes user’s guide, administration manual, observer training manual, technical manual, and reproducible forms used in stages 1 through 3 |
| Publisher Website: | <https://www.pacificnwpublish.com/products/SSBD-Online.html> | | | | | | | |
|  | Key: E= Externalizing Behavior; I=Internalizing Behavior | | | | | | | |
| BASC-3 Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BESS) | X |  | X | X | Ratings by Informants  Age range: 3:0-18:11 (teacher and parent)/8:0-18:11 (self-report)  Standardized tool used to identify behavioral strengths and weaknesses  Intended to be used as a universal screener | Excellent national norms, co-normed with instrument already in use (BASC)  Availability of online scoring and data system (Q-Global)  Inclusion of validity index scores to evaluate the quality of responses that have been provided  Direct link to behavioral interventions | Potential bias and/or teacher subjectivity  Not as useful for measuring effects of specific, individual interventions  Time to complete: 5 minutes per child (screening) | Initial cost of the system to screen a school of 500 students: $1,152.65  Subsequent screenings: $500 (cost of student forms) |
| Publisher Website: | <http://www.pearsonclinical.com/education/products/100001482/basc3-behavioral-and-emotional-screening-system--basc-3-bess.html> | | | | | | | |
|  | Key: E= Externalizing Behavior; I=Internalizing Behavior | | | | | | | |
| Behavior Intervention Monitoring Assessment System (BIMAS) | X | X | X | X | Ratings by Informants (parent, teacher, student, clinician) for children ages 5 to 18 years  Two formats: BIMAS Standard (screener and/or baseline data) and BIMAS Flex (progress monitoring tool) | Designed to be change-sensitive and used for progress monitoring  Flexibility to add specific behaviors to monitor  Reliable, valid, multi-rater screening and progress monitoring system  Measures risk factors (internalizing and externalizing) and strengths/areas of improvement (social and academic functioning) | Screening is lengthy to administer (5 minutes per child)  Probably works best when a whole district in committed  No direct link to specific intervention resources  Only available in English | Screening a school with 500 students would cost approximately  $2, 103 |
| Publisher Website: | <http://www.mhs.com/product.aspx?gr=edu&id=overview&prod=bimas> | | | | | | | |
|  | Key: E= Externalizing Behavior; I=Internalizing Behavior | | | | | | | |
| Social Skills Improvement System Performance Screening Guide (SSIS PSG) | X |  | X |  | Part of the Social Skills Improvement System  Available for three grade levels: preschool, elementary and secondary  Direct link to intervention through the SSIS Class-wide Intervention Program  Not recommended as a progress monitoring tool | Can be completed in 30 minutes for an entire classroom  Included within AIMSweb Behavior (teachers can manage all SSIS data online)  Easy and straightforward scoring  Direct link to interventions through the SSIS Class-wide Intervention Program | The manual only reports correlations with scales from the Social Skills Improvement System  No evidence such as correlations with other published measures  Published peer-reviewed articles written by authors other than the developers not available  Not recommended to be used for individual decision making  Cannot be used for progress monitoring  Lack of scale that assesses internalizing behavior problems | Screening a school of 500 students would cost approximately $190.00 |
| Publisher Website: | <http://www.pearsonclinical.com/psychology/RelatedInfo/ssis-overview.html> | | | | | | | |
|  | Key: E= Externalizing Behavior; I=Internalizing Behavior | | | | | | | |
| Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) and DESSA Mini |  |  |  | X | Ratings by informants  Measures 8 social-emotional competencies  Grades K-8 | National standardization sample, with documented reliability and validity  Comprehensive: screening, assessment, class-wide, progress monitoring, evaluate program outcomes  Strategies that align with DESSA competencies are available  Web-based version | No option for students in grades 9-12  No measure of challenging behavior (internalizing or externalizing) | DESSA:  $120 for a paper and pencil kit   DESSA Mini: $105.95 for a paper and pencil kit (25 copies of each of the four forms) |
| Publisher Website: | <https://www.centerforresilientchildren.org/school-age/assessments-resources/the-devereux-student-strengths-assessment-dessa-kit/> | | | | | | | |
|  | Key: E= Externalizing Behavior; I=Internalizing Behavior | | | | | | | |
| Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) |  |  | X |  | Ratings by self-assessment  Ages 11 to 18 (Grades 6-12)  Measures 8 asset categories (developmental assets - positive relationships, opportunities, and values)  Can be used to assess individual youth or as a group assessment for all participants in a program | Designed to be sensitive to changes in reported assets  Useful for studying effects of youth programs, curricula, and interventions that are designed to enhance youth development and reduce negative outcomes  Strong psychometric properties  Detailed reporting (completed by the SEARCH institute) and guide to implementation process  Optional technical assistance, consulting, workshops and/or presentations from SEARCH Institute | Self-report is the only option (10 minutes to complete)  Limited validity information for context assets  Norms are currently being developed and not available  Necessary professional development for staff surrounding the Developmental Assets framework | Site Report (including up to 100 youth surveys): $250.00  Per Survey Cost for youth surveys in excess of 100: $2.00  Aggregate report (encompassing multiple sites): $250  Individual Data File (one CSV file of all youth surveyed): $150 |
| Publisher Website: | <http://www.search-institute.org/> | | | | | | | |
|  | Key: E= Externalizing Behavior; I=Internalizing Behavior | | | | | | | |
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| Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire | X | X |  | X | Norm referenced parent, teacher, or self-rated questionnaire  Screening for social, emotional and behavioral concerns in children  Parent and teacher forms (3-16 years) and self-report forms (11-16 years) | Very accessible tool that is easy to administer, score and interpret  Manual, rating scales, scoring software and reports available for free online  Available in over 70 languages  Time efficient | Not recommended for progress monitoring tool  Information regarding standardization sample and evidence of reliability and validity is limited  Normative data and psychometric information are not well organized (no published manual)  Reports generated may be viewed as a draw-back due to the risk of parents or other laypeople trying to interpret the report without consulting a mental health professional | Free |
| Publisher Website: | <http://www.sdqinfo.org/> | | | | | | | |
| Key: E= Externalizing Behavior; I=Internalizing Behavior | | | | | | | | |
| Empirical Support and Resources | | | Devereux Center for Resilient Children (DCRC) Assessment Tools: Summary Table. (2013).  Gresham, F. M., & Elliot, S. N. (2011). Test review. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 29*(3), 292-296.  Jenkins, L. N., Demaray, M. K., Wren, N. S., Secord, S. M., Lyell, K. M., Magers, A. M., ...Tennant, J. (2014). A critical review of five commonly used social-emotional and behavioral screeners for elementary or secondary schools. *Contemporary School Psychology*. Doi: 10.1007/s40688-014-0026-6  McDougal, J. L., Bardos, A. N., & Meier, S. T. *Behavior Intervention Monitoring Assessment System*.  Vannest, K. J. *Universal screening for behavior: How do I get started* [PDF document]. | | | | | |

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| Build Your Own Screening Tool | | | | | | | | |
|  | Focus Behaviors | | Overarching Structure | |  | | | |
| Name | E | I | Strength-Based | Needs-Based | Content and Use | Advantages | Drawbacks | Cost |
| Site Specific Screener |  |  |  |  | Simple nomination and Individualized Follow-up  Best used within a multiple gating framework  Use of school-wide expectations | Low cost  User friendly (high social validity)  Brief  Congruence with school-wide behavioral expectations and linkage to Tier 2 and 3 interventions (already in place within the school) | Narrowly defines behavioral risk  Unable to use for identification of internalizing behavior problems  Low test-retest reliability |  |
| Key: E= Externalizing Behavior; I=Internalizing Behavior | | | | | | | | |
| Empirical Support and Resources | | | Burke, M. D., Davis, J. L., Lee, Y., Hagan-Burke, S., Kwork, O., & Sugai, G. (2012). Universal screening for behavioral risk in elementary schools using SWPBS expectations. Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 20(1), 38-54. Doi: 10.1177/1063426610377328  Burke, M. D., Rispoli, M., Clemens, N. H., Lee, Y., Sanchez, L., Hatton, H. (2016). Integrating universal behavioral screening within program-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports. Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 18(1), 5-16. Doi: 10.1177/1098300715580993 | | | | | |