**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