Steps to Conduct a Basic Pilot (Feasibility) Study in Your District to Screen for Behavioral Problems in Students

PREWRITTEN OVERVIEW TO PROVIDE STAKEHOLDERS

Every year, in every school, in every grade, and in every classroom, there is a handful of students with significant emotional and behavioral problems. Not only are these students more likely to struggle academically and socially in school, but their difficulties are more likely to extend beyond the school years into adulthood.

School resources appear to be quite limited in the domain of difficult student behavior. The limitations are, of course, unintentional. They arise for any variety of reasons. Teacher training programs simply do not have room to dedicate to sufficient instruction on effective classroom management. Instead, teachers are asked to learn as they go, and about 50% of all new teachers actually leave the profession due to the lack of support for poor student behavior. School guidance personnel (i.e., school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers) are typically assigned to an entire school, take on multiple responsibilities, and simply do not have enough time in the day to address student needs directly.

These limitations are in contrast to academic approaches in schools. When students are struggling to organize math facts or read passages fluently, they are identified and provided with the appropriate school-based resources to try to remediate their struggles. When students are struggling to organize their behavior and attend to grade-level tasks, they are typically not provided with the appropriate school-based resources because either (a) such resources do not exist or (b) there is no personnel to provide them adequately.

The results are twofold: (1) Students with externalizing behavior problems receive ineffective "reactionary" discipline from administrators, and (2) students with internalizing behavior problems walk through school unidentified, unnoticed, and underserved.

The goal of establishing a "behavioral and emotional student screening protocol" is to create a tiered approach to behavior management within the school system.

Tiered approaches to health, academics, and behavior are all designed to (1) identify problems, (2) provide solutions, (3) prevent serious problems, (4) assess severity of problems, (5) allocate appropriate resources, and (6) ensure the quality and integrity of the institutions providing the services.

Most children in the United States receive health screenings in the form of immunizations and hearing and vision protocols. Currently, public schools are adopting Response to Intervention approaches in academics to screen for learning disabilities in core academic areas.

Behavior screening is simply one more facet of a tiered approach to student success. The whole idea behind screening en masse is to effectively identify concerns before they become serious problems. Significant amounts of time and money are saved through early intervention and providing systematic support for students identified as struggling with significant behavioral and/or emotional problems.

PROCEDURES: FIVE STEPS TO SUCCESS

Behavioral and emotional screening should be held at least biannually. October and January are good months to conduct the screening. By October, it is assumed that most classroom teachers will have a good general idea about student behavior in their class. January screenings allow for any new developments or even new student additions later in the school year.

For the pilot study, the screenings may take place at a faculty meeting or grade-level team meeting. Principals can decide which venue would be the most appropriate. *It is recommended that the pilot study be conducted in no more than two grades at a single school.*

Step 1

Ask teachers to rank order their students in two separate categories: internalizing and externalizing. Definitions of the categories are provided below.

Internalizing behaviors are best described as behavior problems directed inward by the student, withdrawn from the external social environment, that represent problems with self. Internalizing behavior problems usually involve behavioral inhibition (e.g., overly timid, sad) and low self-esteem. Common descriptors include (a) anxious, (b) socially withdrawn, (c) lethargic, and (d) unassertive.

Externalizing behaviors refer to all behavior problems directed outward by the student, toward the external social environment. Externalizing behavior problems usually involve behavioral excesses (i.e., too much behavior) and are considered inappropriate by teachers and other school personnel. Common descriptors include (a) aggressive, (b) defiant, (c) inattentive, and (d) reactive.

Sample rank-order forms are included in this packet.

Step 2

The rank-order forms are collected by a school counselor, and the student names are reviewed. The following checklist is recommended when reviewing the rank-order forms.

Rank-Order Checklist	Yes	No
Is the student on an individualized education plan? (If yes, consider working with special education case manager to devise behavior plan.)		
Is the student on a 504? (If yes, consider working with 504 team to devise behavior-related accommodations.)		
Is the student seeing the school counselor? (If yes, evaluate adequacy of the intervention and availability of the counselor.)		
Is the student an English language learner? (If yes, consider whether or not any language and/or cultural barriers are contributing to the behavior. Intervene accordingly.)		
Is the student receiving outside counseling services? (If yes, facilitate communication with these services and coordinate efforts at school.)		
Are parents aware of any behavioral problems? (If yes, open communication with parents and begin problem-solving approaches to student behavior.)		
Does the student have a history of disciplinary problems? (If yes, what has been done in the past to correct student behavior? Is it working? Why or why not?)		
Is the student receiving adequate behavior management in class?		

Based on the information garnered from the checklist, determine whether or not the student concerns warrant more attention. If the team decides the student concerns warrant more consideration, move on to Step 3.

Step 3

Conduct a planning meeting. This meeting should be no longer than 25 minutes and should be designed to make the most out of a problem-solving meeting with school teams. The goal of this meeting is to provide (1) evaluation, (2) support, and (3) a plan summary for identified students.

If parents have not been notified at this point, they should be notified of the results of this planning meeting.

Step 4

Behavior intervention data should be continually monitored and reviewed as part of a behavior intervention plan. The students in this step should receive consultation and support from the personnel available and familiar with providing behavioral supports. Consideration of further school-based resources and potential community-based resources may take place.

Step 5

After the attempt to screen, rank order, and respond to the screenings, be sure to compare supports and behavioral support needs between those that used the screener and those that did not. Answer the questions.