

## Quality Guide: Evidence-Based Implementation

The *Quality Guide: Evidence-Based Implementation* is part of a collection of resources developed by the Center for School Mental Health for The SHAPE System that provides guidance to help comprehensive school mental health systems (CSMHSs) advance the quality and sustainability of their services and supports. This guide includes background information on implementation in school mental health, possible action steps, and resources to help systems incorporate evidence-based implementation strategies into a long-term quality improvement plan.

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### Background:

The *Evidence-based Implementation* domain within the *School Mental Health Quality Assessment Survey* comprises three indicators to help determine a system’s current capacity for implementing evidence-based practices and programs (EBPs). These indicators measure the extent to which your school or district:

- (1) ...has processes in place for determining whether a school mental health service or support is evidence-based;
- (2) ...has evidence-based services and supports that fit the unique strengths, needs, and cultural and linguistic considerations of your students and families, and
- (3) ...utilizes best practices to support training and implementation of mental health services and supports.

Evidence-based services and supports are supported by data and evidence that indicate that they are effective interventions. Research shows that evidence-based services and supports provide students with a higher quality of care than programs without an evidence base, but there are many factors to consider when selecting and implementing them.

Evidence-based implementation is the integration of research findings from implementation science to school mental health care policy, practice, and operations. This involves the selection of appropriate evidence-based services and supports as well as utilization of effective, best practice strategies informed by implementation science to support and sustain those services and supports. Implementation science is the study of methods that promote the integration of research findings and evidence into health care policy and practice. Implementation science emphasizes an understanding of organizational characteristics and behaviors of healthcare professionals and others as key variables in the sustainable uptake, adoption, and implementation of evidence-based interventions. When implementation is conducted in a purposeful manner with appropriate planning and support, success is achieved at rates greater than 80% in the first three years. Without proper implementation support, long-term success rates are very low.

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## Action Steps:

### 1. Select an EBP that is right for your school or district.

- **Convene a selection committee** of key stakeholders that represents all groups who would be impacted by the EBP, including families, students, parent organizations, teachers, administrators, school-based mental health providers and behavior support staff, community partners, other school/district/community leaders. The purpose of the selection committee is to evaluate the potential success and fit of an EBP by involving all parties, including those who will be implementing it. This also builds ownership and buy-in from the beginning.
- **Conduct a needs assessment and resource map** to identify priority areas for mental health services based on what is currently available in your school/district, in the community, and how that fits with student and family needs in your local context (refer to Quality Guide: Needs Assessment/Resource Mapping for more information).
- **Determine what type of EBP your school or district should prioritize** based on your needs assessment and resource map.
- **Look at existing programs** that are not producing desired outcomes (if applicable) and evaluate whether this is due to poor fit, a lack of evidence base for the program (and thus an EBP might be able to replace it), or poor implementation to date (in which case you could keep the EBP and focus on improving implementation support, as outlined below).
- **Evaluate the rigor of current and potential services and supports.** See Quality Guide: Evidence-Based Services and Supports for action steps on evaluating the rigor of current services and supports, including steps to search for EBPs, important considerations, and how to use national evidence-based registries to identify evidence-based services and supports.

### 2. Prepare for an EBP in your school or district.

- **Engage key stakeholders** who were on your selection committee in the planning process, as well as other stakeholders who should also join the planning effort. Any school-based or school-connected group who would be directly or indirectly impacted by the EBP should be included.
- **Convene an implementation team.** Implementing an EBP in a school or district is a complex effort to be pursued by a multidisciplinary team of all key stakeholders. Look to your selection committee, key stakeholders, and others to form an implementation team to share the work of preparing for, implementing, evaluating, and sustaining an EBP in your school or district.
- **Develop a budget** for all aspects of implementation. Don't forget to budget for effective training practices which include ongoing support, not just one-time training opportunities for new hires.
- **Learn as much as you can about the EBP** by networking with and/or visiting other schools and districts using it, connecting with treatment developers to get all your questions answered, and researching how and where the EBP has been implemented. Is this an EBP that has been used in a school context such as yours? Has the EBP been applied in rural/urban/suburban settings with students and families that are similar to those in your school or district?
- **Identify implementers** who have the appropriate skills/abilities, knowledge, background, cultural and linguistic competence, and ability to commit time to professional development and receive coaching. Consider school-based health and mental health professionals (e.g.,

school or community-partnered psychologists, social workers, counselors, nurses, primary care providers working in the school), behavioral health support staff, educators, and school resource officers. If you are implementing an EBP on the district level, carefully consider which school(s) is most well-positioned to implement the EBP first depending on your long-term plan for scaling up.

- **Train implementers** using best practices such as providing all required materials, some didactic training, and an active, hands-on learning format. Experiential learning formats such as role plays, small group activities and discussion, and modeling are the most effective ways adults learn new skills and turn them into actual practice.
- **Continue support for implementers** because implementation research clearly tells us that one-time trainings are not sufficient for improving and sustaining skills learned. Provide ongoing coaching, consultation, booster sessions, and/or supervision including the support of professionals with the expertise of the EBP as well as peers or alumni implementers who can share lessons learned and offer guidance.
- **Plan ahead for turnover** of individual or school implementers. How can you support new, incoming implementers who join after the initial implementation? Strategies include leveraging the support and mentorship of veteran or alumni implementers, train the trainer models, and setting aside funds and materials to ensure training and support is available for new implementers.
- **Begin conversations about sustainability** regarding funding and other non-financial resources that will need to be in place to continue the EBP in future school years. How will you afford future financial-, time-, personnel-, and expertise-related costs of intervention, training, coaching, fidelity monitoring, and evaluation? Revisit your budget for this action step.

### 3. Implement an EBP in your school or district.

- **Inform the school community** about the EBP, why and how it was selected, what they can expect, and offer opportunities for asking questions and providing suggestion. Examples include holding informational sessions at PTA meetings or events, back to school nights, open house, school assemblies, and school staff professional development days. You might also develop and distribute informational materials with a Frequently Asked Questions section in clear language (approximately 2<sup>nd</sup> grade reading level) and contact information for how to find out more information.
- **Pilot on a small scale first.** If you are implementing an EBP in one school, start small with one classroom or one grade level. If you are implementing an EBP in one district, start small with one school or one classroom or grade level within that school.
- **Monitor intervention fidelity or integrity** by using checklists, live observation, or videotaping. The system you develop can be informed by the treatment developer or other CSMHS you know are implementing the EBP. The fidelity monitoring system you put into place should be an active component of the support for implementers. Implementation drift and adaptation are important topics of fidelity monitoring and coaching/consultation throughout the implementation process and coaches/supervisors should be made aware of fidelity findings.
- **Collect data** on the process of implementation and begin collecting data points for target outcomes. Process data can include fidelity findings. Process and outcome data can be collected formally and/or informally from implementers (e.g., on their perspectives of how

implementation is going, attitudes toward, knowledge of, and skills related to the EBP), students, families, and other stakeholders involved in the process.

- **Revise implementation strategy** based on pilot lessons learned and data collected. Work with your implementation team to determine what worked well and what could be improved prior to scale up. Make an action plan for quality improvement with concrete goals and meet regularly with your implementation team until these revisions and improvements are completed.
- **Scale up** to the whole school or district. You may choose to do this gradually or at once, but make sure you revisit all steps of preparation again as needed prior to scaling up.
- **Collect data** on the process and target outcomes. Again, use lessons learned from pilot data collection to inform this process during scale up. Don't forget target outcomes that tie your EBP to student academic achievement such as a decrease in disciplinary issues and increase in attendance or grades. Collect data you foresee supporting your sustainability efforts.
- **Openly discuss and solicit feedback** about challenges and in order to make decisions about quality improvements during implementation depending on how things are going. This can be conducted in a variety of informal formats such as "town hall" meetings, individual or small group check-ins, or ongoing data collection via anonymous surveys.
- **Continue conversations about sustainability** regarding funding and other non-financial resources that will need to be in place to continue the EBP in future school years.
- **Get the word out** about your success! Form relationships with local media outlets to introduce your work and highlight successes. Use your outcome data to report on the impact of your work.

### Resources:

#### Online Training Videos and Webinars

- Center for School Mental Health (2015) *Module 7: Evidence-Based Practices and Programs: Identifying and Selecting EBPs*. Community-Partnered-School Behavioral Health Implementation Modules. <https://mdbehavioralhealth.com/training>. This module defines EBPs and their importance, provides a list of national web-based clearinghouses for evidence-based prevention and treatment approaches, and discusses how to select and implement an EBP.
- Center for School Mental Health (2015) *Module 8: Implementation Science: Lessons for School Behavioral Health*. Community-Partnered-School Behavioral Health Implementation Modules. <https://mdbehavioralhealth.com/training>. This module describes practical applications of implementation science to school behavioral health, including recommendations for how programs can plan for service provision to maximize their likelihood of effective implementation. In particular, best practices for training of school and community professionals and partners are highlighted.

#### Websites and Web-based Materials

- The National Implementation Research Network provides research and resources on implementation science. For more information, please click here: <http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/>
- The Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute's State Implementation and Scaling-Up of Evidence-based Practices Center (SISEP) at the University of North Carolina at

Chapel Hill offers tools, resources, coaching and learning on implementation and scaling up. For more information, please click here: <http://sisep.fpg.unc.edu/>

- *Ten Critical Factors to Advancing School Mental Health: What Early Adopters Say* Offers a variety of strategies based on school mental health programs nation-wide. <http://csmh.umaryland.edu/media/SOM/Microsites/CSMH/docs/10criticalfactors.pdf>
- *What Students Have to Say About School Mental Health* are key lessons learned from students, educators, and others to consider when developing school mental health programs. <http://csmh.umaryland.edu/media/SOM/Microsites/CSMH/docs/WhatStudentsSay.pdf>

#### Articles and Guides

- National Resource Center for Mental health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, *Safe Schools Healthy Students* (2014). *Selecting Evidence-Based Programs* Retrieved from: [http://www.healthysafechildren.org/sites/default/files/Selecting\\_EBPs\\_Website\\_508.pdf](http://www.healthysafechildren.org/sites/default/files/Selecting_EBPs_Website_508.pdf)
- Education Development Center Inc., (2013). *A Framework for Effectively Implementing Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (EBPs)*. Waltham, MA: PromotePrevent. For more information please click here: [http://www.promoteprevent.org/sites/www.promoteprevent.org/files/resources/Framework%20for%20Effectively%20Implementing%20Evidence-Based%20Programs\\_Practices%20%282%29.pdf](http://www.promoteprevent.org/sites/www.promoteprevent.org/files/resources/Framework%20for%20Effectively%20Implementing%20Evidence-Based%20Programs_Practices%20%282%29.pdf)
- Barrett, S., Eber, L., & Weist, M. (2013). *Advancing education effectiveness: Interconnecting school mental health and school-wide positive behavior support*. *Center for School Mental Health*. For more information, please click here: <http://www.pbis.org/common/cms/files/pbisresources/Final-Monograph.pdf>
- Owens, J., Lyon, A., Brandt, N., Warner, C., Nadeem, E., Spiel, C., & Wagner, M, (2014). *Implementation Science in School Mental Health: Key Constructs in a Developing Research Agenda*. *School Mental Health*, 6(2), 99-111.
- Stephan, S. H., Sugai, G., Lever, N., & Connors, E. (2015). *Strategies for Integrating Mental Health into Schools via a Multi-tiered System of Support*. *Child and adolescent psychiatric clinics of North America*, 24(2), 211-231.
- Sugai, G., & Stephan, S. (2013). *Consideration for a school mental health implementation framework*. In S. Barrett, L. Eber & M. Weist (Eds.), *Advancing education effectiveness: Interconnecting school mental health and school-wide behavior support* (pp.18-33). For more information, please click here: <http://www.pbis.org/common/cms/files/Current%20Topics/Final-Monograph.pdf>