



# Safe Supportive Learning

Engagement | Safety | Environment

## NCSSLE Online Learning Event: Integrating Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) within a Multi-tiered System of Supports and Ensuring Fidelity of EBPs

Recording Link and Q&A Summary

March 30, 2016 | 2:00-3:30 p.m. EST

---

On March 30, 2016, the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE), on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education (ED)/Office of Safe and Healthy Students, hosted an online learning event on the topic of “*Integrating Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) within a Multi-tiered System of Supports and Ensuring Fidelity of EBPs*”. The online learning event, facilitated by **Katie Deal** (*Technical Assistant Specialist, NCSSLE*) explored strategies for integrating EBP’s within Multi-tiered System of Supports, collecting data and information to understand if EBPs are being implemented as intended, and using data to inform future practice. During the session, the presenters (**Allison Dymnicki**, *AIR, Senior Researcher* and **Kristine Hensley**, *Supervisor of Student Services in Hillsborough County Public Schools*) received several questions from participants. The Center has prepared the following Q&A Summary with responses to each question that was asked during the event. The summary is divided by questions directed to Allison and Kristine, but in some cases, both Allison and Kristine responded. For additional information, please email or call the Center ([ncssle@air.org](mailto:ncssle@air.org); 1-800-258-8413).

*Please note the content of this summary was prepared under a contract from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students to the American Institutes for Research (AIR). This Q&A Summary does not necessarily represent the policy or views of the U.S. Departments of Education or Health and Human Services, nor do they imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education.*

### Questions to Allison Dymnicki – AIR Senior Researcher

---

**Q1:** What are strategies for identifying which Tier 2 and 3 level EBPs could work for each unique district? What other recommendations do you have for choosing EBP’s at these levels? Some Tier 2 and 3 level issues districts may want to address include relational conflict between peers, anxiety around coming to or being in school, inappropriate behaviors in the classroom (sexualized, aggressive) etc.

**A1:** Kristine has some very good suggestions about how her district does this. Some districts and schools administer quarterly assessments to identify the academic needs of all students (Tier 1 approaches) and of specific subgroups or individual students (Tier 2 and 3 approaches). Often times, school climate data or school staff identify and discuss groups of students or individual that are acting out, demonstrate



# Safe Supportive Learning

Engagement | Safety | Environment

internalizing symptoms, or staff have other types of concerns about. You will need some kind of data to be able to identify these needs and this data needs to be collected often enough to understand if the EBPs being implemented for specific groups of students are actually making a difference. For example, if you see that sixth grade African American students have much higher rates of school-based physical violence than other groups, you might want to identify a Tier 2 program for middle school students that targets physical violence and ensure that the program has been implemented with African American students or that the program can be adapted for this population. Frequently, identifying Tier 3 EBPs is done by looking at the needs of students with the highest levels of concerns and then seeing how many of these students would be helped by a specific program. For example, if you have 100 students in your school that are showing signs of anxiety, how many of them might be helped if you implemented a small group program where students were taught ways to manage and cope with anxiety. Again, data about what the needs of these students are is key. Monthly meetings with school-based teams overseeing EBPs should occur to discuss whether or not a program seems to be working for a group of students or a specific student.

**Q2: What are ways universal programs can or cannot be used as a tiered 2 or 3 approach?**

**A2:** This should be done carefully. Most of these programs were designed to be implemented schoolwide or classroom wide so delivering a program in a small group or individually (which is usually how Tier 2 and Tier 3 programs are delivered) might change what and how activities can be done and what content is covered. It could be that more material can be covered in a universal program than in a tier 2 or 3 approach and you need to plan your time accordingly. I would recommend contacting the program developer and asking for guidance as well as asking to speak to any other schools that have adopted a universal program for a tier 2 or 3 approach.



# Safe Supportive Learning

Engagement | Safety | Environment

Q3: How do you determine if you need to make an adaptation, when you've just "tweaked" it or when you'll truly influence implementation with fidelity?

A3: Great question, there is great debate in the field of implementation science about when you are "tweaking" a program to meet your school's needs and when you have made substantial enough changes so that the program is no longer being implemented as intended. I err on the side of recommending that all schools think thoughtfully about each core component of an evidence-based strategy and reflect on whether each of these components is appropriate for your school context and student population. Only change the components that everyone agrees are not appropriate for your school context and school population and people can articulate why. A program probably has been "truly influenced" if a core component is entirely eliminated or the core objectives of a program are no longer addressed. For example, Second Step is designed to decrease problem behaviors and increase whole-school success by promoting self-regulation, safety, and support. If you are no longer teaching self-regulation skills to students, then the program is not being implemented as intended.

**Bonus answer from Kristine:** "Adaptations" to the EBP's are not the focus of implementation, or occurring in Tier 2 or 3 in our district. As we discuss these needs and plan with the program developers we are working with, we ensure the programs are being implemented as intended, audience size is reduced.

Q4: In your experience, is there a "most common" implementation gap?

A4: The "most common" implementation gaps that I observe is not realizing the importance of having infrastructure and capacity at the district and school to support the initiative. For example, in an evaluation where six districts are implementing the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS), we see considerable differences in terms of districts and schools making progress based on district and school leadership support and the extent to which leaders have incorporated MTSS into their strategic plans and school improvement plans. Key to the success of many efforts is creating school-based implementation teams that oversee the implementation of a multi-tiered system of support and evidence-based programs and having available resources such as adequate collaborative planning time for staff to share successes and challenges when implementing MTSS or a specific evidence-based strategy.

**Bonus answer from Kristine:** In the field we see common gaps we continue to focus on as a district:

- 1) Systems malfunction or gaps in the system within the MTSS framework resulting in the need to refocus on streamlining how we identify students in need, prescribing the appropriate intervention, and following up on the outcome. There is always room for improvement with systems within the MTSS framework.



# Safe Supportive Learning

Engagement | Safety | Environment

- 2) In addition, it is not uncommon for schools' self-assessment of fidelity to be different from a fidelity assessment conducted by the district. This situation uncovers a great starting place for discussion of the gaps to continue strengthening implementation through continuous improvement.
- 3) Finally, if a school doesn't have strong administrative support and school-wide behavioral expectations to support the foundation of the MTSS framework, implementation efforts may be compromised.

## Q5: What is the importance of statistical significance of school climate data?

A5: Many times researchers discuss programs that are effective, evidence based, or research based as programs where people have found "statistically significant impacts" on targeted outcomes in previous evaluations. Most of the time, this means that there is a significant difference between schools receiving the program and schools not receiving the program on outcomes that the program was intending to address. What is equally important to understand is the size of that difference (often described as an effect size). For example, does the data show a 2% difference for violent incidents between schools receiving the programs and schools not receiving the program (which is not that large) or a 10% difference?

## Questions to the Kristine Hensley – Grantee presenter

---

### Q1: How is implementation measured?

A1: Implementation is measured utilizing the fidelity instruments provided with the EBP's. A fidelity monitoring and review schedule is followed and results discussed with sites to implement necessary course corrections and ensure implementation efforts continue to occur with fidelity. Fidelity of implementation is also measured via observation, interviews, and surveying students and staff.

### Q2: At the student level (rather than the school or district level), how do you select interventions for students?

A2: Problem-solving leadership teams meet to discuss students currently identified as needing supports and interventions based on early warning indicators and other data points. The problem-solving leadership team in collaboration with a student's family discusses the data, present concerns and make recommendations in the best interest of the student. Early warning indicators including identifiers such as thresholds for attendance, referrals, suspensions, grades, etc. trigger placement and movement within the tiers. Parent request, behavioral observation, and additional data points (input from the team or



# Safe Supportive Learning

Engagement | Safety | Environment

student's past outcomes utilizing programs) can impact the identification of a particular intervention to meet the needs of the child.

Q3: What is the scope of Student Services at your district?

A3: Hillsborough County Student Services Department encompasses Health Services, School Counseling, Psychological Services, School Social Work Services, Attendance, and Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports. The Overarching Division of Student Services in the district also includes Athletics, Exceptional Student Education, Non-Traditional Programs-K-12 (Youth Services, Alternative Education, and Juvenile Justice Transition) and Professional Development.

Q4: What is your Transportation Curricula?

A4: Over the project period, our project will utilize three transportation curricula including: In the Driver's Seat, Safe Supportive Learning, and Peaceful School Bus.

Q5: How do you rotate the curriculum- do you use more than one tool simultaneously?

A5: Curricula are rotated based on the behavioral needs of the students at the time. More than one tool is used simultaneously as necessary, again depending on the needs of the school/students as illustrated in the data. As behavioral trends start surfacing, decisions are made regarding the implementation of curricula. Having rich data reporting and discussions with your Information Technology Departments will allow you to receive the data necessary to assist you with this decision making.



# Safe Supportive Learning

Engagement | Safety | Environment

Q6: Who implements your Too Good for Drugs/Violence with Tiers II and III?

A6: Trained student services staff in our project schools.

Q7: As the speaker mentioned, we are finding implementation most successful in our elementary schools? Any tips or ideas for how to get especially our High Schools on board?

A7: Since scheduling constraints have posed some issues, our middle schools for example, have reconsidered moving to an eight period day to devote one period to RtI to overcome some these scheduling issues. Teaming in middle school is being discussed as well as common planning again to overcome these challenges. Our high schools (we only have 4 in the project) do struggle with time constraints. It has made a positive difference with improving buy-in by maintaining an ongoing presence in the high schools (all schools actually) and ensuring schools recognize we are here to help them implement MTSS within their unique landscape. We have established an ongoing feedback loop to strengthen this collaborative support.