Get the Whole Picture:
Using Social, Emotional and Behavioral Assessments to Support Student Success

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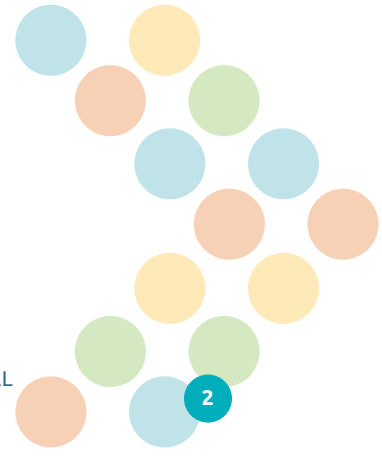


Introduction

Fostering Positive Social, Emotional and Behavioral Functioning to Promote Student Success

Dr. Stephen Kilgus, *Associate Professor of School Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Madison*

Schools are increasingly recognizing their role in supporting the whole child. Yes, academic skills are important, but social, emotional and behavioral (SEB) functioning also plays a key role in student achievement (Algozzine, Wang, & Violette, 2011). Students' social skills and emotional states are inextricably linked to their behavior and ability to learn and succeed — when students are safe, healthy, supported, engaged, and challenged, they are more likely to have positive academic outcomes and achieve long-term success in life.

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework is a response to the need to support the whole child (McIntosh, 2019). MTSS is a framework designed to help educators provide high quality instruction and interventions that are tailored to students' individual academic and SEB needs and that are monitored on a regular basis. Data plays a key role in MTSS and is used to guide instruction and select the most effective supports, resources and interventions.

MTSS recognizes the important link between academics and SEB functioning. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and social and emotional learning (SEL) programs are two approaches widely used within MTSS to promote strong SEB skills. PBIS encourages expected behaviors while SEL helps students achieve positive SEB functioning which is defined as:

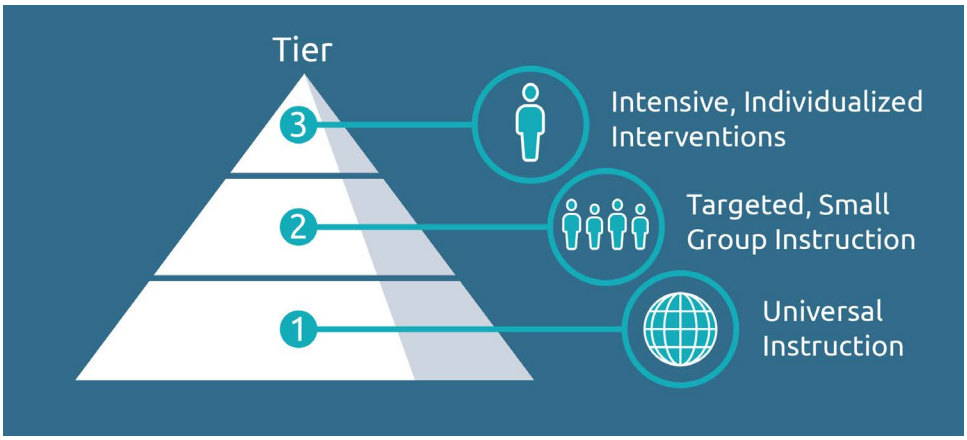
1. the presence of social and emotional skills (e.g., self-awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making), and
2. the absence of problematic behaviors and emotions (e.g., defiance/ noncompliance, withdrawal, anxiety; Suldo & Shaffer, 2008).

Research consistently shows that increasing students' social and emotional competence has a positive impact on their ability to succeed (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Students with strong social and emotional competence have fewer behavior infractions in the classroom and are better able to manage stress and depression (Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). Universal SEL instruction can help *all* students (Tier 1) — even those who are aren't currently showing risk indicators — improve their SEB functioning. Through behavior screening, educators can identify Tier 2 students who could benefit from targeted, small group instruction and Tier 3 students who have acute needs and require more intensive support.

Let's take a closer look at how SEB assessments and interventions work within MTSS to support academic achievement …

What is Social, Emotional and Behavioral MTSS?

Many schools have adopted MTSS as one way to support student SEB functioning (McIntosh, 2019). Within these systems, a continuum of interventions and supports are provided across multiple tiers for students with a range of needs.



Tier 1

Schools provide prevention strategies to increase SEB functioning for all students. Schools may adopt an SEL curricula or program to help students develop their social and emotional skills. Or, schools may incorporate SEL into their PBIS approach.

Tier 2

Schools use SEB assessment data to identify students who need additional supports and better understand why each student is struggling. While each school is different, the Tier 2 group is typically comprised of roughly 10-15% of the student population. Tier 2 interventions are intended to be brief and efficient, mostly due to the large number of students that could require supports within a school. Tier 2 interventions should be continuously available to students once their needs have been identified.

What is PBIS?

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support, or PBIS, is an evidence- and data-based framework designed to improve student growth in academic performance, safety and behavior while establishing and maintaining positive school culture. Two examples of embedding SEL within PBIS are:

1. The use of tailored lesson plans that help students understand and meet school-wide expectations
2. Positive reinforcement strategies that reward positive behavior

Tier 2 SEB interventions can take multiple forms:

Small-group instruction can be used to supplement or expand upon universal or class-wide instruction. Assessment data can help educators know which social and emotional skills to prioritize within the class or small group.

Contingency management interventions, such as Check In/Check Out (CICO), can be used to promote and reinforce social and emotional skills and prosocial behavior, while also minimizing reinforcement of problem behaviors.

Tier 3

Schools develop and deliver intensive intervention plans for students who demonstrate especially high needs. This group is typically comprised of approximately 1-5% of the student population. Tier 3 interventions usually include multiple strategies, including both instructional and contingency management interventions (e.g. involvement of social workers, mental health professionals, etc). Intervention strategies are highly individualized and are based on data such as:

Skill assessments that detect the specific social and emotional skills in need of improvement.

Functional behavior assessment (FBA) that is used to determine the function(s) of student problem behavior (e.g., attain adult attention, escape academic instruction).

Using Assessments to Promote MTSS Efforts

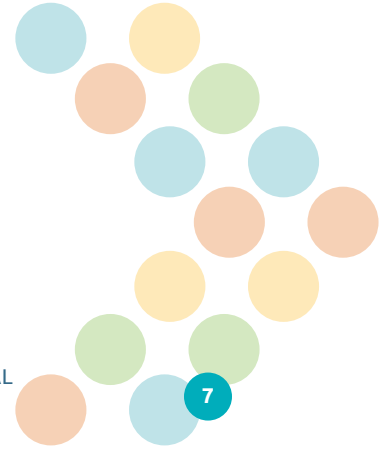
Data-driven decision making is an important component of MTSS. Teams regularly collect and analyze many types of data to guide instruction, identify at-risk students, and facilitate timely and effective intervention. A few examples are:

- **Performance data,** such as attendance, behavior incidents and GPAs, flag students who are or may soon become at-risk of struggling academically.
- **SEB data** can help shed light on *why* a student is struggling — information that performance indicators can't provide. For example, two students are failing math. One student lacks foundational knowledge of the content and could benefit from tutoring. The other student is suffering from trauma and isn't able to concentrate in class. The intervention for the second student is much different and may involve counseling or supports provided by a psychiatrist or social worker. SEB screening can help identify the root causes behind why students are struggling, information that can save valuable time and resources.
- **Improvement data,** typically in the form of progress monitoring, helps MTSS teams know how well an intervention is working and whether adjustments are needed.

In terms of supporting SEB functioning, two of the most important data practices are universal screenings and progress monitoring. Universal assessments are important for gaining insight into the general SEB needs of your students. Progress monitoring not only shows whether students are making adequate improvement, but it also helps educators adjust intervention strategies, so they are more effective.

Universal Screening

Universal screening helps educators understand the general needs within a school and which areas need the most improvement (Jenkins, Hudson, & Johnson, 2007). For example, a universal assessment may show that a high number of students within a school are experiencing elevated levels of anxiety. Educators can use this information in a proactive, prevention-oriented way to start a Tier 1 intervention around teaching all students techniques for effectively managing stress. Follow-up screenings will show which students need additional supports and may require Tier 2 or 3 intervention.



Let's contrast universal screening with a more reactive approach, such as using office discipline referrals (ODRs) to guide intervention decisions. Say a student is experiencing high levels of anxiety. In class he is easily irritable and often displays unexpected outbursts. The teacher, not understanding why the student refuses to participate, becomes frustrated and dismisses the student as a "problem student." A common ODR-related decision rule is that students should receive Tier 2 or 3 intervention once they have accumulated two or five ODRs, respectively (McIntosh, Campbell, Carter, & Zumbo, 2009). Unfortunately, in this student's case, by the time he has received multiple ODRs, he has been experiencing high anxiety levels for some time, which could make the condition more difficult to treat and less responsive to intervention. To make matters worse, ODRs are typically given in response to more serious externalizing behaviors, such as aggression and defiance. Thus, by focusing on ODRs alone, schools are unlikely to detect students exhibiting internalizing behaviors (e.g. depression and anxiety) and therefore may not provide the supports he really needs.

Universal screenings, on the other hand, can be used to detect a wide range of problem behaviors of varying intensity, including those related to both externalizing and internalizing concerns. Screening tools can also identify SEB concerns early on, before they become too severe and when they are more responsive to intervention. In the case of the student with high anxiety levels, a universal screener would identify his needs early on, and educators could use this insight to create an intervention plan that helps him manage his anxiety before he resorts to aggression or falls into depression. Schools are increasingly turning towards the universal screening approach to proactively address students' needs, which in the long term is a much more effective use of valuable time and resources — an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Know the Difference Between Externalizing and Internalizing Behaviors

Students with emotional disturbances or mental health problems may display symptoms in different ways. Educators should be mindful of the common types of externalizing and internalizing behaviors.

Externalizing Behaviors are directed towards others and may include:

- Disruption
- Aggression
- Bullying
- Theft
- Vandalism

Internalizing Behaviors are directed inward and may include:

- Difficulty Concentrating
- Social Withdrawal
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Substance Abuse

For the best results, universal screening should be conducted on a continuous basis (e.g. three times per year). This helps educators know how well students are developing social and emotional skills and if the intervention strategy should be modified. Educators can use the data to tailor interventions according to students' unique needs. The data can also be used in aggregate form to show if particular SEB concerns are more prevalent within certain schools, grades or classrooms. This information can help schools develop Tier 1 interventions that are provided school wide.

Progress Monitoring

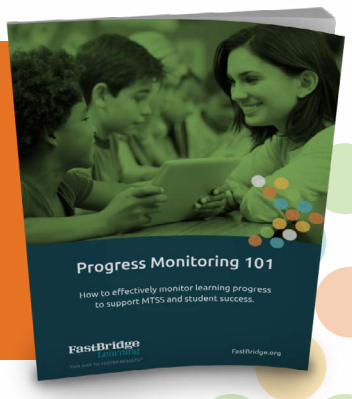
Once a student begins to receive Tier 2 or 3 supports, there is a need to engage in progress monitoring. Progress monitoring is the practice of administering an assessment multiple times throughout the school year to determine if and how students are responding to an intervention. If students are not making expected progress, educators can use the data to make adjustments to improve the intervention (Christ, Riley-Tillman, & Chafouleas, 2009). Progress monitoring goes further than informal check-ins (e.g., a counselor or other stakeholder asking a student, "How's it been going?") and the collection of pre-post data. Informal check-ins are not systematic and may not be reliable. And although pre-post data collection supports data-based decisions regarding intervention responsiveness, it does not tell educators whether an intervention is having its intended impact or whether an alternative approach might be more effective.

To engage in progress monitoring, educators should collect data regarding key variables on an ongoing basis (e.g., daily or weekly). Progress monitoring data are not intended to be comprehensive or diagnostic. Rather, each data point represents a sample or "snapshot" of a student's SEB functioning at a particular point in time. Once aggregated, these snapshots reveal valuable insight into how SEB functioning has changed over time. Educators can use this information to determine if their interventions are working and should continue, or if a change to the intervention plan is required.

Dive Deeper into Progress Monitoring

Progress monitoring is only useful to MTSS if it's done right. Are you using the most effective progress assessments available? Do you know how to analyze and act on progress data to make better instructional decisions and provide stronger student supports?

This eBook covers it all. **Read it now.**



Selecting the Right SEB Assessment Tool

When selecting an SEB assessment tool for use in universal screening or progress monitoring, educators should be careful to select a tool that is:

- research- and evidence-based
- statistically valid, reliable and accurate
- usable and feasible
- appropriate for use in school settings (Christ et al., 2009; Glover & Albers, 2007).

Universal Screening: Key Characteristics

1. Technical adequacy

The SEB assessment should be reliable, valid and accurate.

Reliable: There is consistency:

- Among items within the screener (internal consistency)
- Between raters completing the same tool with regard to the same student (inter-rater)
- Across administrations separated in time (test-retest)

Valid: Scores are predictive of key outcomes at the time of the screening (concurrent validity), as well as in the future (predictive validity).

Diagnostic accuracy: Scores can be used reliably to differentiate students exhibiting SEB concerns from those who are not. The importance of diagnostic accuracy is crucial because educators need to be sure they are accurately identifying and supporting those students who are most in need.

2. Usability and feasibility

Beyond being technically adequate, screeners should also be sufficiently usable and feasible.

- **Usable screeners** provide educators with immediate access to data (e.g., via online scoring systems) and reporting is easy to understand without time-intensive or costly training.
- **Feasible screeners** can be completed, analyzed, interpreted, and used with available time, resources and personnel.

3. Contextual appropriateness

In addition to being technically adequate, feasible and usable, the screener must also be suitable for use in all school settings, and it must fit within a school's unique educational context. More specifically, the tool should:

- Predict SEB constructs that are of interest to the school
- Be suitable for use with the ages/grades to be assessed
- Be translated to the languages spoken within the district

Schools should also determine whether the screening tool is aligned with

their particular service delivery model. For instance, if the school wants a screener that will support categorizing students by different levels of needed support (Tier 2 vs. Tier 3), the tool should be capable of differentiating students by level of concern (e.g., moderate or high risk).

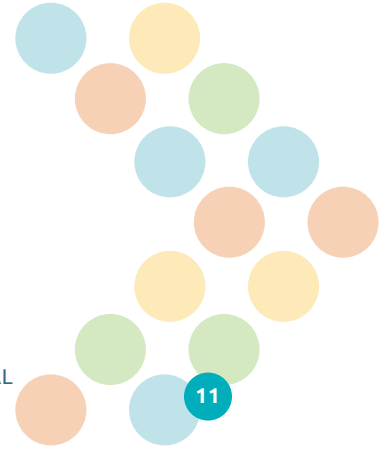
Progress Monitoring: Key Characteristics

1. **Technical adequacy**
   Like screeners, progress monitoring tools should contain certain psychometric properties. One particularly important property is sensitivity to change. This will help educators know if student functionality is improving over small increments of time and in response to intervention. A measure may yield scores that are reliable and valid predictors of some psychological or educational construct. However, evidence of reliability and validity does not indicate whether a measure is capable of detecting change in that construct over time.

2. **Repeatability**
   The frequency with which a measure can be administered is also an important factor. The screener should be flexible enough that it can be administered quickly and correspond to relatively short time frames (e.g., one class period, day or week).

3. **Flexibility**
   Progress monitoring tools should also be flexible, permitting their use with a range of students with varying SEB concerns. The tool should measure a range of items or subscales corresponding to different social and emotional skills or problem behaviors. In preparing to monitor a particular student's progress, an educator can select which items or subscales are most aligned with that student's unique needs. A tool can also achieve flexibility by supporting the creation of items or observational targets on a case-by-case basis.

4. **Usability and feasibility**
   Like universal screeners, progress monitoring tools should be both usable and feasible. The need for feasibility is especially important with progress monitoring because it requires the collection of many data points over time. Educators need to be able to quickly administer the assessment and make sense of the data to support timely intervention-related decisions. Electronic (typically online) solutions for entering, storing and analyzing data, are particularly helpful and increase the speed with which educators can act upon progress monitoring findings.



Creating an Assessment Plan That Works for You

There are a variety of logistical considerations to keep in mind when planning to universally screen or progress monitor behavior and social and emotional competencies. Before you begin, be sure to address the following questions to determine what, when and how the data will be collected and used.

Universal Screening Logistics

1. **Who will collect screening data?**
   Universal screening data can be collected by a variety of people. For instance, a parent can rate the SEB functioning of their own child. A teacher can rate all of the students in their class. Finally, a student can rate their own personal SEB functioning. The most appropriate choice will vary depending on the age range and SEB variable in question. For example, research suggests that when a school is interested in adolescent internalizing concerns, students might be best suited to rate themselves (Smith, 2007). In contrast, child externalizing concerns are best measured by teachers or parents.

2. **Which screening tool will be used?**
   Who will be collecting the data will influence the decision of which assessment will be used. Other considerations are which skills you want to measure and how you plan to analyze and use the data. The majority of SEB universal screening tools developed to date represent brief behavior rating scales, which include a small number of items (e.g., 7-25) that can be completed in 1-5 minutes for each student. Examples of such screening tools include the Social, Academic and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener (SAEBRS; Kilgus & von der Embse, 2014) and the BASC-3 Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BESS; Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2015).

3. **When and how often should screenings be conducted?**
   Some schools choose to screen once a year, typically in the fall. Others screen in the fall and spring, which helps them measure how SEB concerns change over time for individual students and across the broader school. The best models screen three times per year (i.e., fall, winter, and spring), which supports repeated detection of student risk. Research suggests that while winter and/or spring screenings might not detect many more

students beyond those identified through a fall screening, some students are indeed newly identified (Miller et al., 2019). This suggests that by conducting multiple screenings per year, schools are more likely to detect students with SEB needs early on as they begin to manifest.

4. How should screening data be collected, stored and analyzed?

Universal screening data can be collected in a number of ways. Screening tools that are freely available and in the public domain are usually completed via paper-and-pencil or through district-developed surveys administered through an online platform (e.g., Google Forms, Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey). The data is then transferred to an electronic spreadsheet for storage. Educators must then aggregate scores and generate reports to support decision making. For screening tools available at a cost, many vendors have developed online assessment systems that make it easy to collect, store and automatically summarize the data via electronic reports.

Watch as Dr. Stephen Kilgus Explains the FastBridge SEB Screeners — SAEBRS and DevMilestones

Watch Now

Progress Monitoring Logistics

1. What variables should be monitored?

The variables selected for progress monitoring can be specific to a student's unique concerns and should reflect the problem behaviors they commonly exhibit (e.g., calling out, aggression) or the social and emotional skills they have yet to acquire (e.g., self-awareness, relationship skills). These skills and behaviors are typically targeted for intervention. Alternatively, progress monitoring can correspond to broader SEB variables (e.g., disruptive behavior, academic engagement, and social and emotional competence). Though these broad variables might not necessarily be targeted for intervention, research suggests they are nevertheless predictive of overall SEB functioning and can thus help educators understand general effects of intervention (Chafouleas, 2011).

2. Which progress monitoring tool should be used and who should collect the data?

Once a school has decided which skill(s) will be assessed, the next step is to determine the best person to conduct the assessment and to select a tool that meets the criteria established for the assessment. As with screening, educators should make this decision based on the variable and age of the student in question.

There are two main methodologies of SEB progress monitoring.

Systematic direct observation (SDO) involves a trained third-party observer (e.g., school psychologist) who collects data regarding student behavior using a pre-specified coding procedure within a particular time and setting (e.g., large-group math instruction, 11:00-11:30am). Given its objective and independent nature, SDO is particularly appropriate for high-stakes cases (Tier 3).

Direct behavior rating (DBR) involves a parent, teacher or some other informant completing a brief rating of student behavior during a time and setting similar to that described in SDO. Although DBR is slightly less objective than SDO and data is collected by stakeholders closely related to a case, this method can still afford valid data suitable for standalone use with lower stakes cases (Tier 2). It can also be used to supplement SDO data in higher stakes cases.

3. When and how often should data be collected?

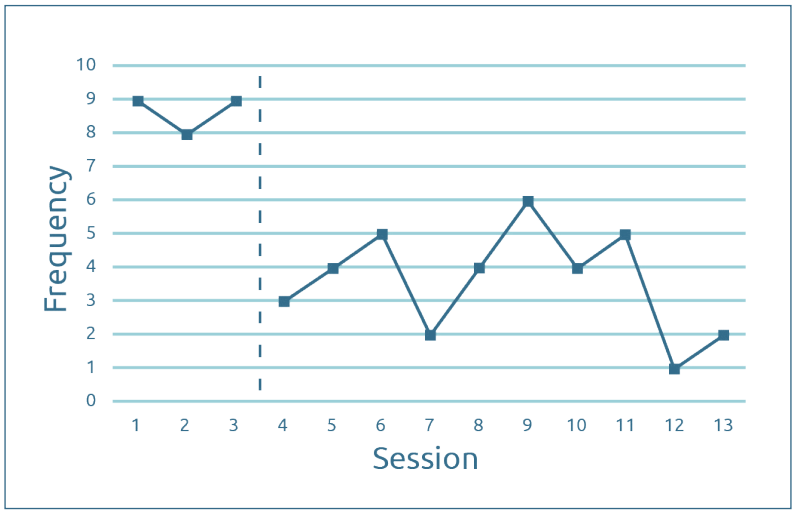
Schools should carefully consider the best time and setting to conduct progress monitoring. For most students, this will be the one or two activities or class periods where SEB concerns are most common. How often data is collected depends on the following factors:

1. **How intense is the SEB concern?** Progress monitoring data should be collected more frequently for more severe SEB problems.
2. **What is the nature of the SEB concern and what intervention is being used to address it?** If an SEL curricula is being used to teach a student one or more social and emotional skills, students will typically develop these skills gradually and over a period of time. In this case, it might be appropriate to only collect one or two data points per week. On the other hand, if a contingency management intervention is being used to increase the frequency of a skill the student has already learned, educators can expect more immediate change and thus could collect data multiple times per week.

It is strongly recommended that schools collect progress monitoring data both prior to and during intervention. Data collected before implementation can serve as a baseline against which the student's performance during intervention can be compared. This comparison helps educators determine how well the student is responding to intervention. Within each phase of data collection (i.e., baseline and intervention), multiple progress monitoring data points should be collected within each skill of interest. This will increase the reliability and validity of the data and will help educators see a more accurate picture of how students are progressing.

4. **Data collection and storage:**
As with universal screening, schools can choose to collect progress monitoring data via paper-and-pencil or electronic systems. Schools can choose to build their own electronic systems or adopt those developed and published by assessment vendors. Whichever approach is taken, educators must ensure their system allows for the efficient entry, summary and graphing of data to ensure educators can easily access and analyze the data. Data graphs in particular provide a quick and easy visual that can help educators efficiently process data (more on this coming up…).

If a school chooses to create its own graphs, they should consider using the conventions demonstrated in the figure below. Scores on the progress monitoring tool (vertical [y] axis) are plotted across data collection sessions (horizontal [x] axis). Data points are connected by a line to demonstrate data trends over time. The vertical dashed line shows when intervention implementation began.



Leveraging Universal Screening Data

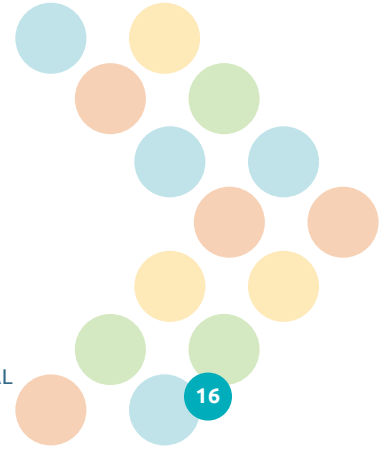
Schools can make the most of their limited resources by taking a multi-step approach to evaluating universal screening data, which can be used to inform decisions across all MTSS tiers (Kilgus & Eklund, 2016).

Step 1. Establish a serviceable base rate (SBR) of SEB concerns. The SBR is the percentage of students you can feasibly support at Tier 2 or 3 given your existing personnel and resources.

Step 2. Examine your screening data and calculate the base rate of SEB concerns across your entire school and within each grade. If you identify more students in need than you are able to provide Tier 2 or Tier 3 services for, you may consider revising or enhancing your Tier 1 plan.

Step 3. Consider establishing an SBR at the classroom level and support teachers in adopting class-wide intervention strategies designed to help all students. For example, teachers could incorporate the Good Behavior Game, Class-Wide Function-Related Intervention Teams (CW-FIT) and positive peer reporting. Be sure to provide teachers with the supports (e.g., training, planning time, coaching) they need to make this approach successful.

Note: If there are only a few students within a class who are exhibiting SEB concerns, these students could be referred for Tier 2 or 3 interventions. On the other hand, if there are many high-risk students in a particular class, be sure to support your teachers, e.g. by helping them improve their classroom management skills and instructional practices.



Gaining Insights from Progress Monitoring

To help ensure your progress monitoring stays on-track and is most effective, be sure to evaluate data on a continuous basis and with the addition of each new data point. Two primary approaches can be taken:

1. **Visual analysis of graphed data,** where educators evaluate changes in data level (e.g., mean or median), trend and how baseline data compares to a point in time after the intervention has started. Educators should also examine (a) any overlap in data between phases and (b) how soon any observed changes occurred.

2. **A data analytic approach** involves the use of single-case design effect sizes to quantify the degree of change in SEB functioning following intervention implementation. Many single-case effect sizes have been developed to date, including both nonoverlap statistics and standardized mean difference statistics, both of which can be calculated using simple equations and web calculators (e.g., www.singlecaseresearch.org).

Conclusion

In summary, schools are increasingly recognizing that to support the whole child and ensure student success at school and beyond, educators need to promote *both* student academic skills and SEB functioning. To achieve this goal, schools are adopting MTSS frameworks that help educators provide high quality instruction and interventions that are tailored to students' needs and monitored on a recurring basis. SEB MTSS frameworks teach students critical social and emotional skills and help prevent problematic behaviors.

Assessments are an important component of MTSS, and the data collected facilitate decision making and bolster intervention effectiveness. Two of the most important forms of assessment are universal screening and progress monitoring. Some schools have chosen to develop their own approaches to conducting these assessments, employing paper-and-pencil methods or electronic solutions housed within popular survey platforms (e.g., Google Forms). Other schools have elected to adopt an online assessment system available from educational assessment vendors.

Currently, the only assessment system that supports both universal screening and progress monitoring for academic skills (e.g., math and reading) and SEB is FastBridge. Data collection through FastBridge is easy and efficient, and makes it simple for educators to collect and compare SEB and academic data to get a complete picture of student performance and the factors affecting it.

Learn How FastBridge is Helping Educators in Tennessee Support the Whole Child

"It's one thing to look at grades and see a student is struggling across most content areas. But when you're able to piece together additional pieces of that data story — that they lack readiness skills or have difficulty with sustained attention and initial engagement — that informs the type of intervention needed."

— Patti Wilson, District Response to Instruction and Intervention Coordinator
Clarksville-Montgomery County School System, TN

Watch the Video

About FastBridge

The FastBridge formative assessment system has helped educators in more than 40 states build and sustain MTSS frameworks that promote data-based decision-making across core, supplemental and intensive instructional settings to impact learning growth through a unique combination of Computer-Adaptive Tests (CAT) for universal screening and Curriculum-Based Measures (CBM) for progress monitoring across reading, math and SEB.

FastBridge's easy-to-read reports facilitate collaborative problem-solving by connecting data to recommendations for evidence-based instruction and intervention delivery, and our professional development and training builds teachers' capacity to implement assessments and interventions correctly and with confidence.

With FastBridge progress monitoring, teachers can frequently check in on Tier 2 and 3 students in your MTSS program, measure their rate of improvement and determine whether targeted instruction and interventions should be maintained, modified or intensified to close achievement gaps, faster.

Learn more about using FastBridge to support both academic and SEB screening and progress monitoring within your MTSS.

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