School Mental Health Quality Guide

Needs Assessment & Resource Mapping

SHAPE

School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation System

University of Maryland School of Medicine

NCSMH National Center for School Mental Health

School Mental Health Quality Guide: Needs Assessment & Resource Mapping is part of a collection of resources developed by the National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH) at the University of Maryland School of Medicine for The SHAPE System. The Quality Guides provide guidance to help school mental health systems advance the quality of their services and supports. This guide contains background information on needs assessment and resource mapping, best practices, possible action steps, examples from the field, and resources.

Recommended APA reference

National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH, 2020). *School Mental Health Quality Guide: Impact*. NCSMH, University of Maryland School of Medicine.

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What is a Needs Assessment?

A needs assessment is a collaborative process used by a system such as a school, district, or agency to identify strengths and gaps, clarify priorities, inform quality improvement, and advance action planning. A needs assessment should integrate available data and perspectives from a diverse group of stakeholders.

School mental health is intended to be tailored to meet the needs of a school or district, recognizing that needs vary from one school or district to another. A needs assessment can help teams both develop and assess existing mental health services and supports, as well as identify the most pressing mental health concerns.

Conducting a needs assessment can also help teams identify strengths; teams should determine how to use their strengths to help address gaps, inform action planning, and allocate resources appropriately.

What is Resource Mapping?

Resource mapping is an active, ongoing process to identify, visually represent, and share information about internal and external supports and services; it is used to inform effective use of resources. In school mental health, resources in schools and the surrounding community can be mapped across a multi-tiered system of support.

A resource map (also referred to as an asset map or environmental scan) can be a map that shows the location and type of available services or a directory/guide that lists available services and resources. Including information about eligibility and details can help improve student follow-through and coordination of care.

Because schools often collaborate with multiple agencies (e.g., health, juvenile services, social services, behavioral health) and programs, understanding the services provided by each agency/program reduces duplication and inappropriate use of services.

Many schools and school districts have not strategically mapped or created a list of school-based and community supports available for students and families.

How Do Needs Assessment & Resource Mapping Fit Together?

A needs assessment can help identify pressing needs and challenges in the current system of care, and a resource map can offer a clear representation (in the form of a list, directory, or map) of appropriate resources in the school or community. If you are conducting a strengths assessment or have strengths assessment results, resource mapping can identify how to build upon the strengths of student groups or the overall school mental health system.

Tips

When developing a needs assessment, there are a range of topics that can be included.

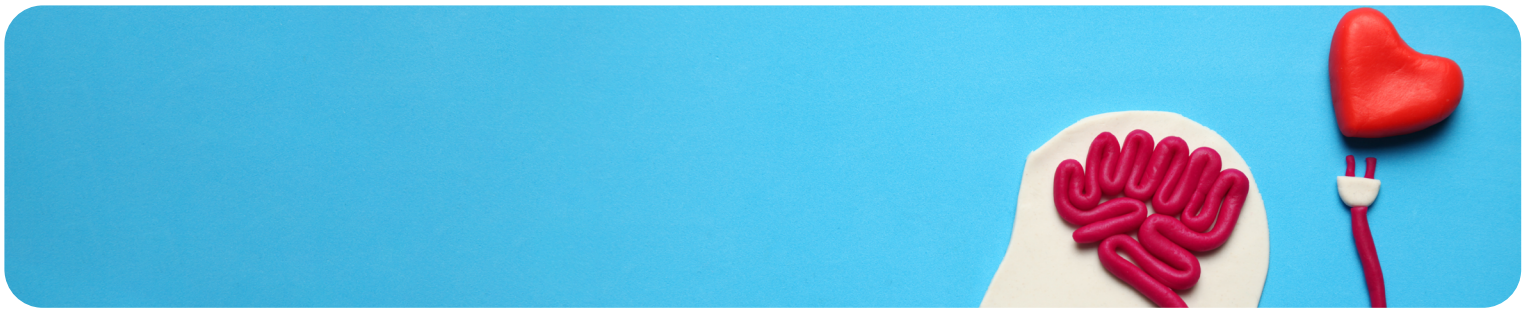
Topics to consider:

- Student stressors and mental health concerns
- Knowledge of mental health supports in school
- Preferences for different types of mental health and wellness services
- Usage of and satisfaction with current mental health and wellness services
- Feedback and recommendations about current mental health and wellness services provided in school
- Student connectedness to school, school staff and peers
- Acts of kindness in school
- Positive role models at school
- Student, staff, and family well-being
- Healthy relationships, behaviors

Assess student mental health needs.

Best Practices

- ✓ Convene a team that includes diverse groups (e.g., parents, students, school and community health and mental health providers, school administrators, school staff)
- ✓ Review existing data (e.g., office referrals, expulsion and suspension rates, attendance and truancy records, nursing and counselor logs, crisis referrals, emergency petitions, school climate and behavioral surveys, incident reports, homework completion rates, homelessness rates) to identify needs
- ✓ Identify additional data that might inform student needs and develop a process to gather it
- ✓ Utilize needs assessment tools and processes that are psychometrically sound and culturally relevant
- ✓ Pilot needs assessment with students, families and other relevant groups for feedback and revisions before large-scale data collection
- ✓ Summarize and review needs assessment data to determine:
  - most pressing needs impacting most students (Tier 1), some students (Tier 2), and just a few students (Tier 3)
  - patterns of needs (e.g., emotional/behavioral, medical, basic [e.g., food, housing], social support, financial needs, family functioning)
  - how well current services and supports are meeting student needs



Assess student mental health strengths.

Best Practices

- ✓ Convene a team that includes diverse groups (e.g., parents, students, school and community health and mental health providers, school administrators, school staff).
- ✓ Review existing data (e.g., school climate surveys, focus groups) to identify strengths.
- ✓ Collect data to identify student strengths and developmental assets (e.g., school connectedness, social skills, belonging, gratitude, self-determination, grit, self-awareness, self-management, personal responsibility, decision making).
- ✓ Utilize strengths assessment tools and processes that are psychometrically sound and culturally relevant.
- ✓ Pilot your strengths assessment with students, families and other relevant individuals for feedback and revisions before large-scale data collection.
- ✓ Summarize and review strengths assessment data to determine how current supports and services leverage and address gaps in student strengths.

action steps

Needs Assessment & Pre-mapping

Determine who will participate in the mapping process. Include a diverse group that understands and represents the community. Consider members from the following groups:

- School health and behavioral health staff
- School administrators
- Parents/families
- Community health and behavioral health providers
- Juvenile justice
- Administrative staff
- Teachers
- Youth/students
- Parent Teacher Association
- Child welfare
- Community leaders

Conduct a needs assessment to determine strengths and needs of students and their families in your school or school district.

- Take inventory of current data and build upon existing efforts.
  - Gather data from office referrals, expulsion and suspension rates, attendance and truancy records, nursing and counselor logs, crisis referrals, emergency petitions, school climate and behavioral surveys, minor incident reports, homework completion rates, homelessness rates, etc.
  - Identify what other data might be useful for your school and how to gather it.

Resource: The SHAPE Screening & Assessment Library lists a wide range of mental health constructs and measures to consider.

- Assess student strengths.
- Measures to consider: Devereaux Student Strengths Assessment; the Strengths and Difficulty Questionnaire (free); the Social Emotional Health Survey; and/or the Social (free), Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener.

Resource: The Wisconsin School Mental Health Needs Assessment is an example of a survey designed to identify the strengths and areas of improvement for your school in managing the social-emotional and mental health needs of students.

Examples of questions that could be included in a needs assessment

- What are the two greatest stressors faced by students?
- If you needed counseling related to stress or other concerns, where would you go for help?
- Would you recommend the available mental health services to another student?
- If you have used the mental health services in the school before, on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the most satisfied, how satisfied were you with the services?
- What are some of the community's strengths?
- What actions would you recommend to improve current services and supports?

Analyze the resulting data and determine patterns, such as:

- Are there common problems?
- Where are they occurring (i.e., specific grades or a subset of classrooms)?
- What are the most pressing behavioral health issues that affect all or most students (Tier 1), some students (Tier 2), and just a few students (Tier 3)?

In the context of a child's developmental level and culture, consider:

- Basic needs (e.g., food, housing)
- Medical needs
- Financial needs
- Family strengths, demands, values, and functioning
- Emotional/behavioral needs
- Social support
- Child strengths

Use needs assessments to inform decisions.

Best Practices

Use your needs assessment to inform decisions about selecting, planning, and implementing appropriate services and supports.

- ✓ Develop a comprehensive needs assessment report that is easy to understand readily accessible to inform decisions.
- ✓ Use needs assessment data to inform how gaps can be addressed with existing or new services and supports.
- ✓ Use needs assessment data to prioritze selection of areas of focus, programs and strategies, and action steps.

action steps

Identify Gaps

Conduct a gap analysis to identify and prioritize gaps between students needs and available resources.

Resource: The Gap Analysis Worksheet helps your team document needs, current resources, and gaps between needs and resources. This resource can also help your team prioritize needs and create a plan for addressing needs.

Resource: The Needs Assessment Planning resource helps schools and districts guide decision-making after completing a needs assessment. This tool can help teams identify high priority needs to address.

Conduct resource mapping.

Best Practices

Use best practices to conduct resource mapping or have access to an updated resource map or guide to identify existing school and community mental health services and supports.

- ✓ Use multiple sources to identify mental health resources (e.g., SAMHSA's Behavioral Health Treatment Services locator, 211 from United Way) available to students and families across a multi-tiered system of supports.
- ✓ Create and foster school-community partnerships to ensure ongoing communication about existing and new programs, services, and supports available to students and families.

- ✓ Develop a user-friendly, updated, comprehensive resource map or guide that includes data about each resource (the name of the program/organization, description of service, website, address, phone number, hours of service, eligibility requirements, insurance accepted, cost of services, waitlist status, any other unique considerations).
- ✓ Include target outcomes and evidence of impact for each service.
- ✓ Ensure the resource map or guide is easily accessible to diverse stakeholder groups.
- ✓ Establish a process and dedicated staff to regularly evaluate, update, and improve the resource map or guide.

action steps

Sustainable Mapping

Pre-Mapping

- Determine the audience of the resource guide to inform the types of resources and depth of information (e.g. definition of terms, how the resources are intended to be used) to include. Audiences might include: administrative staff, teachers, school nurses, behavioral health professionals, and/or students and youth.
- Reference example resource maps.

Resource: The FAIRSTART Resource Map is a great example of a detailed resource map that lists a range of providers from outpatient therapists to in-home care agencies.

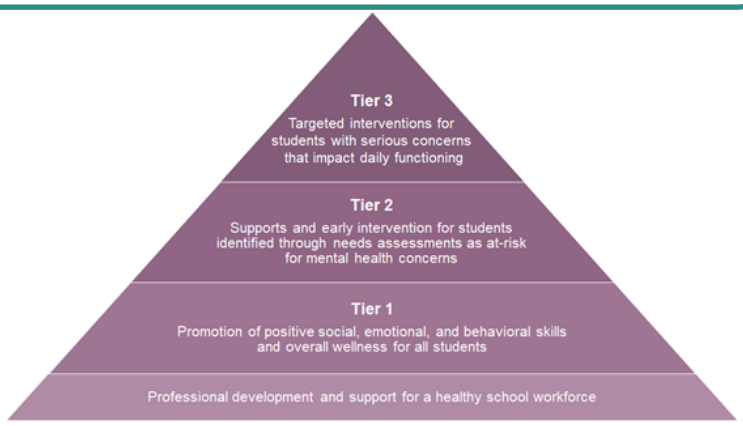
Identify the categories of resources you would like to map. These could include:

- Crisis Hotlines
- Housing Resources
- Recreation Programming
- Group Therapy
- Inpatient Programs
- Mental Health Services
- School-Based Mental Health Services
- Enrichment Activities
- Hospitals
- Emergency Room Departments
- Support Groups
- Food Resources
- Mentoring
- Individual & Family Therapy
- Day Treatment Programs
- After School Care Programming
- Tutoring
- Mobile Crisis Teams
- Urgent Care Facilities
- Advocacy Programs

Brainstorm known staff and resources.

Resource: The Resource Mapping Resource Guide (pg. 14-15) includes helpful worksheets for mapping known resources.

Many schools rely on a multi-tiered framework of support to address the interconnected academic and behavioral health needs of students. Resources can be categorized across a three-tiered system of support, aligning specific resources to each tier and ensuring that there are resources to address needs within each tier.



Resources: SAMHSA's Behavioral Treatment Services Locator provides comprehensive information about mental health services and resources across the United States. It can be used to identify local resources available to staff, students, providers, and families.

2-1-1, a United Way database, details thousands of federal, state, and local services for those with a variety of health needs.

The Resource Mapping Resource Guide includes worksheets that can help teams systematically identify and map resources (pg 21-23).

Maintain, Sustain, and Evaluate Mapping Efforts. Develop evaluation strategies to determine whether:

- Resources actually meet needs, and that families follow through with and are satisfied with services.
- Feedback from school-based staff and community partners is well-integrated into mapping.
- Outline processes for evaluating the resource mapping. Identify how information will be collected to help evaluate the success of the mapping process.
  1. Brief questionnaires and focus groups can clarify what is currently being done, whether it is being done well, and areas for improvement related to mapping of school and community resources. Yearly or bi-yearly surveys and focus groups can ensure that resource maps remain current.
  2. Determine the group of individuals within a school that will identify resource mapping successes, challenges, and areas for improvement.
  3. Develop a process for implementing change based on feedback.

Example from the Field

One midwestern high school with approximately 1,700 students conducted a team-based resource mapping process to assess behavioral health capacity and resources currently available inside and outside the school. Their process revealed the following:

- A lot of support is available in the school, but students, families, and staff are often unaware of the services and how to access them.
- Tier 1 and Tier 2 services and supports are available, but limited.
- Tier 2 and Tier 3 services and supports from the school-based health center can be better utilized.

Use updated resource map for making decisions.

Best Practices

Use an updated resource map or guide to inform decisions about selecting, planning, and implementing appropriate services and supports.

- ✓ Pair needs assessment data with a resource map to consider how needs can be met with existing school and community supports and services.
- ✓ Consider reducing or abandoning services and supports that lack evidence of impact.
- ✓ Use resource map to identify areas of need that are not adequately addressed by existing supports and services and seek to identify existing or develop new referral options to meet the need.

action steps

Strategic Abandonment

When selecting, planning, and implementing new services and supports, consider how existing supports are functioning. If the services and supports do not produce desired outcomes or are duplicative, teams should consider abandoning them.

Resource: The Ector County Independent School District has a useful Strategic Abandonment Tool. This worksheet helps teams determine the usefulness, cost-effectiveness, and necessity of various services and supports.

Example from the Field

One small school district (8 schools, 6,000 students) in upstate New York developed a resource map template based on feedback from district and school stakeholders. Resource mapping goals included:

- Increase awareness of school mental health services among school staff and administrators
- Provide clear information about how to refer students
- Serve as a reference in Student Support Team meetings for planning student interventions

The resource map detailed resources both within the community and across the school district. The 12 sections contained information on mental health resources, emergency mental health, parent resources, regional wraparound services, and services for persons with developmental disabilities, as well as services identified within 7 outlying counties that youth either move to or from. The map was disseminated via a workshop-based training. A team was identified to annually modify and update the map.

Use your team to gather information.

Best Practices

- ✓ Use your diverse team (school staff, community partners, parents and students) to identify and gather information about current or prospective school mental health services and supports. Include who is implementing, how students are identified, data collected and analyzed, the intended target outcome(s), and training and ongoing support.
- ✓ Identify areas of overlap and/or misalignment.
- ✓ Make decisions about how to align existing services and supports to avoid duplication.
- ✓ Consider reducing or abandoning existing serivces and supports to avoid duplication.
- ✓ Consider reducing or abandoning services and supports that are redundant.
- ✓ Develop a team-based process for ensuring complementarity of initiatives.

action steps

Initiative Alignment

Gather your team of diverse stakeholders
Align initiative across the three tiers of support (Tier 1- mental health promotion, Tier 2 - prevention, Tier 3 - intervention).

Identify areas of need:
- Develop a process to select new initiatives.
- Develop a team-based process for ensuring complementarity of new initiatives.

Plan to monitor implementation.

Resource: The Working Smart: Initiative Alignment Map provides a simple template to help your team avoid duplication of initiatives through outlining existing initiatives and informing the selection of new initiatives.

Resource: In addition to describing initiative alignment strategies, the Technical Guide for Alignment of Initiatives, Programs and Practices in School Districts include the Alignment Self-Assessment Action planning tool which helps schools identify their priorities and stay organized. The guide includes several worksheets to help schools align initiatives across tiers and create an action plan.

For more resources, visit the SHAPE Resource Library at www.theSHAPEsystem.com

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