



Core Feature 6: Evidence-Based and Emerging Best Practices

The gap between the research and the extent to which practitioners use research to direct practice has been widely recognized. Over the past few decades, a movement toward evidence-based practice (EBP) has emerged and is growing across disciplines, including education and mental health. In mental health, EBP focuses on using the best available evidence in making decisions about prevention, promotion and intervention. As school staff and mental health practitioners build comprehensive systems, evidence-based practices are translated into a tiered system known as Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).

The source document, [*Advancing Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems: Guidance from the Field*](#), summarizes the expert panel conversations on evidence-based and emerging best practices by coming to the following critical agreements:

- Using research-based interventions and best practices within an MTSS increases the likelihood that youth will have access to effective

interventions matched to their strengths and needs.

- School districts can learn more about evidence-based interventions by accessing databases such as the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>.
- Evidence-based approaches that promote mental health and reduce mental illness are not solely directed at students; for example, strategies that

focus on social and environmental determinants of mental health, school climate, or staff wellness each have a positive influence on student mental health.

- MTSS also allows for the installation of practices to support specific target populations. For example, trauma-informed schools are increasingly adopting MTSS as a foundational framework for interventions across the continuum of mental health supports.
- In addition to ensuring that a practice has been tested through a scientifically rigorous process, it is important that the practice is based on population strengths and needs; is culturally relevant; and can be implemented given current workforce capacity, cost and organizational infrastructure.

The conversation among stakeholders focused on four themes:

- What existing evidence-based local or state school-based mental health programs are publicly available as resources, technical

assistance and mentoring for the development/enhancement of new programs?

- In comprehensive systems, how do school and mental health partners share EBPs that might not be known to the other?
- How can we support trauma-informed practices for all partners in a comprehensive school mental health system?
- What kinds of professional development are effective in developing knowledge, skills and dispositions for effective school mental health systems? What is provided? What needs to be developed?

This Dialogue Guide incorporates both sources. The guide offers *Reaction Questions* and *Application Questions* from which you can choose Dialogue Starters that will allow you to take these conversations into your work.

Resources

Resources to inform this content are available at:

- [Advancing Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems](#), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- [What Works Clearinghouse \(WWC\)](#)
- [National Implementation Research Network \(NIRN\)](#)
- [The National Center for Healthy Safe Children](#)
- [The National Center for School Mental Health](#)
- [The Interconnected Systems Framework 201](#), Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports
- [Dialogue Guide Response Strategies](#)

Practice Issue 1

What existing evidence-based mental health programs are available as resources, technical assistance and mentoring for the development/enhancement of new programs?

Reaction Questions:

1. How do multiple sources, including federal, state and other investments, make it more likely that every school has access to evidence-based practices, regardless of resource challenges?
2. What other publicly available resources are available through your state and regional centers for professional development and technical assistance?
3. A community survey has identified an issue with anxiety among adolescents. The school staff and community providers know that the issue may look different to schools and families.
 - Based on your experience, how might they proceed?
 - How might you make them more aware of the resources available to help them come together and guide them in addressing their shared concern?

Application Questions:

1. Many excellent federal investments offer an array of evidence-based resources but are still unknown to sites that need the information they provide. How would you go about seeking publicly available information?
2. Once a school district has access to the available evidence-based practices, they must select the practices that have the greatest relevance to their need.
 - Using the *If You* Response Strategy, select one role of potential influence and describe how you would use your influence to promote the selection of evidence-based practices that meet the needs in your setting.
3. When multiple initiatives within a district or school practices, including evidence-based practices, are not aligned, confusion is likely. As a stakeholder, how would you make the case for a careful and informed process in selecting practices that have the best match to your needs?
 - What points might resonate with:
 - School leaders?
 - School staff?
 - Mental health providers?
 - Families and youth?

Practice Issue 2

In comprehensive systems, how do school and mental health partners share EBP that might not be known to the other?

Reaction Questions:

1. Using a 1-10 Scale (10 high), rate the extent to which school staff and mental health providers work together regularly on shared challenges. Support your rating.
2. Why is it important for school staff and mental health providers to build a working relationship by partnering on challenges?
 - In terms of programs and practices?
 - In terms of supportive relationships?
 - In terms of responsive strategies and interventions?

Application Questions:

1. School staff and their mental health partners have different training traditions, access to different practices, and different experiences in service delivery. In your view, what will it take to build the ally relationship that underlies successful cross-sector support for school mental health systems?
2. What are your “look fors” (*Response Strategy: My Look Fors*) in detecting an authentic cross-sector partnership for school mental health?
3. Mental health providers have expertise in clinical practices that may be important in both community and school settings. School staff have expertise in delivering strategies in the school environment.
 - How can the expertise of each be respected and leveraged in a collaborative mental health system?
 - What technical issues (implementation strategies, tools and practices) need attention?
 - What human factors (familiarity, turf, role confusion, etc.) demand attention?
4. Using the *Four Quadrants*, place the issue of cross-sector collaboration in a quadrant.
 - Describe the thinking behind your choice.
5. Using the iceberg visual in the response strategy *What Lies Beneath*, describe the collaborative practice issues that are:
 - At the surface?
 - Above the surface?
 - Below the surface?

6. Communities of Practice (CoPs) have the potential to bring stakeholders together around shared work. Choose a role of influence and describe what you would do in that role to build a CoP that focuses on one of the following:
 - Encouraging school and community providers to share knowledge and deepen their connections.
 - Connecting schools' staff, community providers and families in one CoP.
 - Communicating the practice knowledge and lived experience to decision-makers.
 - A critical issue that you have recognized.
7. Using the *Give and Get Response Strategy*, describe:
 - What school staff members have to learn from community providers.
 - What community providers can learn from school staff.
 - What both community and school staff can learn from families.

Practice Issue 3

How can we support trauma-informed practices for all partners in a comprehensive school mental health system?

Reaction Questions:

1. In your view, what is the relationship between trauma and mental health?
2. From your perspective, why is it important to address the social and emotional health of educators and mental health practitioners?
3. Trauma literature often talks about "compassion fatigue." From your perspective, what might compassion fatigue look like?

Application Questions:

1. The relationship between trauma and mental health is an issue of current attention, yet some initiatives addressing these topics within systems are not well connected. In your view, why do systems fail to see these connections?
2. Practices associated with mindfulness, yoga, grief and loss training, and trauma training are often applicable to mental health practices in schools. How can we ensure that practices developed for one purpose are considered for more holistic application?

3. The literature on alignment often discusses the organization in which evidence-based practices are situated.
 - What is the connection between organizational health and aligned practices?
 - What are your “look fors” (*Response Strategy: My Look Fors*) in sensing the health of an organization?

Practice Issue 4

What kinds of professional development are effective in developing knowledge, skills and dispositions for effective school mental health systems? What is provided? What needs to be developed?

Reaction Questions:

1. In your view, what types of professional development (PD) are needed to make practice change stick?
2. Using a *1-10 Scale* (10 high), rate the following professional development strategies and formats:
 - Expert presentation
 - Interactive presentation
 - Co-created presentation
 - Scenarios
 - Problem-solving teams
 - One-time delivery
 - Spaced, ongoing delivery
 - Time-limited workgroups
 - Learning Communities/Communities of Practice
 - Other... please describe

Application Questions:

1. To go beyond information to understanding in our professional development offerings, what would we:
 - Start doing?
 - Stop doing?
 - Continue doing?

2. Even when implementers know what to do, they need support to make evidence-based practice part of **their own** practice.
 - Beyond initial training, what supports should we provide?
3. School culture plays an important role in selecting professional development practices.
 - What should school mental health partners consider when determining PD options?
 - How might school mental health partners judge the effectiveness of their PD offerings?
 - What accounts for choosing or continuing the use of a low-impact PD practice?
4. The professional development literature refers to the individual's ability **to use** their training actively to address opportunities and challenges as having "agency."
 - How can a comprehensive system of school mental health develop agency among its school and community partners?
 - What is at risk if they fail to develop agency among potential collaborators?