

## Alignment of School Mental Health Quality Frameworks and Tools: Guidance to the Field

Schools play a vital role in supporting student social, emotional, and behavioral well-being to promote learning and success. Accordingly, the school mental health field has a robust and growing landscape of resources designed to support comprehensive, evidence-based, effective strategies to promote well-being throughout school communities. However, the proliferation of numerous high-quality resources has at times left school and district teams unsure about when to incorporate additional resources they learn about and how to strategically align timing and use of various tools and frameworks. This guidance document provides an overview of several leading school mental health quality implementation tools and frameworks, key messages they have in common and considerations for introducing new tools in a manner that is complementary to existing efforts.

### Overview of Frameworks and Tools

Three leading frameworks designed to support student social, emotional, and/or behavioral well-being in schools include Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), the Interconnected Systems Framework (ISF), and Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems (CSMHS). Each framework is briefly reviewed below along with the primary team self-assessment tool developed for each. Note that there are a variety of team self-assessment tools and versions for each framework not reviewed here. For more information on any framework or tool, weblinks and resources are provided.

### Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS)

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based three-tiered framework for improving and integrating all of the data, systems, and practices affecting student outcomes every day. It is a way to support everyone – especially students with disabilities – to create the kinds of schools where all students are successful. PBIS isn't a curriculum you purchase or something you learn during a one-day professional development training. It is a commitment to addressing student behavior through systems change. When it's implemented well, students achieve improved social and academic outcomes, schools experience reduced exclusionary discipline practices, and school personnel feel more effective.

#### **PBIS Team Self-Assessment Tool: SWPBIS Tiered Fidelity Inventory (TFI)**

The purpose of this tool is to measure the extent to which school personnel are applying the core features of school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS) to guide implementation and sustained use. Within each tier there are questions for teams to respond to about different aspects of operating each tier such as staffing, team composition, professional development, student/family/community involvement, screening, and data-based decision

making. It is intended to be administered upon initial implementation and re-administered every three or four team meetings until 70% fidelity is achieved across three administrations.

Sections: Tier I: Universal SWPBIS Features  
Tier II: Targeted SWPBIS Features  
Tier III: Intensive SWPBIS Features

Completed by: School System Planning Team (3-8 people) with an external SWPBIS coach as facilitator

For more information, visit: <https://www.pbis.org/resource/tfi>

## **Interconnected Systems Framework (ISF)**

The Interconnected Systems Framework is a structure and process to integrate and align Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and School Mental Health (SMH). The goal is to blend resources, training, systems, data, and practices in order to improve outcomes for all children and youth. There is an emphasis on prevention, early identification, and intervention of the social, emotional, and behavior needs of students. Family and community partner involvement is critical to this framework. A monograph was published in 2013 (Barrett, Eber, & Weist, 2013) outlining strategies for local, regional, and state entities to do this work, with a second edition released in 2019 (Eber et al., 2019).

### **ISF Team Self-Assessment Tool: Interconnected Systems Framework Implementation Inventory (ISF-II), Version 3.**

The purpose of this tool is to measure the extent to which education and school mental health partners are applying the core features of the ISF. This assessment groups questions into Tiers 1, 2, and 3 (similar to the TFI, above) but with an emphasis on each of these core features that integrates PBIS and SMH. Once data are entered, reports are generated to facilitate action planning.

Core Features: Implementation of SWPBIS  
Teaming  
Collaborative Planning and Training  
Family and Youth Engagement  
Intervention Selection, Implementation and Progress  
School-Wide Data-Based Decision Making

Completed by: PBIS/ISF Team with a trained ISF Facilitator or Coach

For more information, visit: <http://www.midwestpbis.org/interconnected-systems-framework/tools>

## **Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems (CSMHS)**

Comprehensive school mental health systems (CSMHS) provide array of supports and services that promote positive school climate, social and emotional learning, and mental health and well-being, and reduce the prevalence and severity of mental illness. They are built on a strong foundation of district and school professionals, including administrators, educators, and specialized school-based support personnel in strategic partnership with students and families, as well as community health and mental health organizations. These systems also assess and address the social, political and environmental

structures — public policies and social norms included — that influence mental health outcomes. In 2019, the Federal-National School Mental Health Workgroup released a Guidance Document detailing the core features, impact, and successful implementation examples of CSMHS (Hoover et al., 2019).

### **CSMHS Team Self-Assessment Tool: School Mental Health Quality Assessment (SMH-QA)**

This tool is designed for school or district teams to 1) assess the comprehensiveness of their school mental health system and 2) identify priority areas for quality improvement. The SMHQA includes seven domains of comprehensive school mental health, all critical to establishing and sustaining a full continuum of supports for the well-being of students, families and the school community. The SMH-QA can be accessed on [www.theshapesystem.com](http://www.theshapesystem.com), a free, web-based platform where individuals can create a SHAPE account and establish school, district, entity (e.g., regional), and state teams for shared data reporting and collaboration. The SMH-QA is completed online within a SHAPE account, which allows for automatic scoring and summary reports. SHAPE also includes a resource library of materials for each domain to support quality improvement planning based on SMH-QA results, including a Quality Guide for each domain with best practices, resources, tips for practical application and examples from the field.

- Domains:
- Teaming
  - Needs Assessment & Resource Mapping
  - Mental Health Services and Supports (Tier 1)
  - Early Intervention and Treatment Services & Supports (Tiers 2 & 3)
  - Screening
  - Funding and Sustainability
  - Impact
- Completed by: Any new or existing team dedicated to advancing school mental health systems at the school or district level. Individual completion also available.
- For more information, visit: [www.theshapesystem.com](http://www.theshapesystem.com)

### **How do PBIS, ISF and CSMHS intersect?**

ISF, the integration of PBIS and SMH, is one example of a CSMHS. In addition to using PBIS and/or ISF tools, many schools and districts also use SHAPE to assess and improve their CSMHS. If a system is already using PBIS or ISF tools, it may feel redundant to do the entire SMH-QA on SHAPE, but some of the modules and resources on SHAPE would likely still be very helpful to those who want to systematically improve school mental health beyond the scope of areas included in PBIS and/or ISF.

## Key Messages

For nearly two decades, national leaders at the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) Technical Assistance Center on PBIS and the National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH) have collaborated to promote clear messaging to the field about shared values for supporting students. Four key messages have been presented at numerous meetings including the National PBIS Leadership Forum and Annual Conference on Advancing School Mental Health. These messages represent common themes that are intentionally reflected in all frameworks (PBIS, ISF, CSMHS) and tools contained in this guidance document. **Consistently using *any* of the frameworks or tools described in this document will likely add value and improve the quality of supports and services available to your students and school system.**

### Key Message 1: Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

School mental health programs and initiatives are always installed and aligned with core features of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework. MTSS core components are screening, progress monitoring, data-based decision making at all tiers, and a multi-level prevention system ([AIR, 2020](#)). This provides a proactive, preventative framework designed to optimize student success by intentionally selecting and implementing evidence-based, culturally and linguistically responsive services and supports based on individual student strengths and needs. MTSS teams accomplish this by including multidisciplinary representation of team members from education, community partners, families and students.

### Key Message 2: Single System of Delivery

At local, school, district, and state levels, there should be one integrated system of delivery for all social, emotional and behavioral supports that is coordinated, systematic and purposeful. School-employed and community-employed professionals across education and mental health systems should participate together on teams to promote coordination, collaboration, and shared responsibility and recognition for the work.

### Key Message 3: Beyond Access - Ensuring Positive Outcomes for ALL

Schools offer a critical access point to improve the likelihood that students and families in need of mental health services will receive them. However, access is not enough, and is not the only reason mental health is integrated into educational settings. Services and supports delivered in schools must be of high quality, interventions should be selected and matched to student needs and strengths using data, and implementation outcomes such as fidelity should be monitored over time. Student progress, response to mental health interventions, and outcomes should be tracked, monitored, reported, and used to inform quality improvement on a continuous basis.

### Key Message 4: Promoting Mental Health for ALL

Universal mental health promotion for all students and staff in the school community is foundational to PBIS, ISF and CSMHS. This includes positive school climate, positive discipline practices, teacher and school staff well-being, mental health literacy, positive behaviors and relationships and social emotional

learning. In particular, social emotional and behavioral health and well-being should be taught by all staff across all school settings and embedded in all curricula.

## Considerations for Measure Alignment

Many of the constructs in the tools developed for PBIS, ISF, and CSMHS overlap. In addition to the four key messages detailed above, a review of the three tools described in this guidance document shows consistent emphasis on high-quality teaming processes, selection and implementation of evidence-based practices across an MTSS, partnering with students, families and community organizations, data-driven decision making and outcomes monitoring. Ultimately, school, district, and state teams must decide which framework(s) and/or tools work best for their local goals, priorities, systems, teams and structures.

### Steps to Align Team Self-Assessment Tools

1. **Discuss your goals** – Discuss as a team what aspects of school social, emotional, or behavioral supports, services and systems you are interested in better understanding and improving in the short and long term. Determine who would complete and use the results of a team self-assessment tool for quality improvement and what is most relevant to their workflows as well as school, community, and student needs.
2. **Map current team self-assessment tools** – Identify which team self-assessment tools are being used by schools and districts, including who is using them, how they are being used, and at what intervals.
3. **Assess utility of current tools being used** – Talk to the team currently completing and using tools to understand the usefulness of the data collection process and results, including how actionable the results are and their relevancy to performance and quality improvement.
4. **Determine if new or different tools may add value.** Whether your team decides to try out a new tool in place of the existing one(s) or add to what is already collected, you probably want to test a new tool on a small scale (e.g., within one team, school or district) first to understand the effort and benefit of it before scaling up. Options to incorporate a new tool may include:
  - a. Test an additional tool to complement current tool(s)
  - b. Test replacing a current tool with a new or different tool(s)
  - c. Select components of self-assessment tools most desired with input from tool developers and with consideration for reducing redundancy and promoting efficiency
    - i. Examples: SWPBIS TFI may be used to assess one or two of the tiers; the SMH-QA can be completed in a modular fashion by domain; ISF-II contains many items on the SWPBIS TFI
5. Pilot new or different tools and obtain feedback on value added
6. Counterbalance administration schedule to avoid team fatigue

## Example Tool Adoption Scenarios<sup>1</sup>:

- District A is dedicated to promoting positive discipline, and PBIS has been an effective framework in many schools. However, they also want to ensure there is attention to a wide variety of mental health concerns that pose barriers to learning. District A decides to **implement the ISF-II to add a mental health focus to their already-strong foundation in PBIS.**
- District B has many schools implementing SWPBIS with high fidelity and there is momentum and resources (e.g., external SWPBIS coaches available) to expand PBIS to additional schools. **District A introduces the SWPBIS TFI to additional schools to scale up PBIS** which is already very effective in other schools in the district. For those schools with high fidelity SWPBIS, they decided to **test the addition of the SMH-QA** to respond to schools' interest in increasing a focus on the core features of mental health quality.
- District C includes schools delivering various aspects of school mental health services and supports throughout the district. They want to optimize district-wide quality and consistency of mental health promotion, prevention and intervention services and supports in partnership with community mental health providers. **District C decides to use the SMH-QA with school teams to assess areas of strength and growth in their current school mental health system to establish quality improvement priorities.**

### What is **The National School Mental Health Curriculum** and how does it fit in?

The National School Mental Health Curriculum (co-developed by the National Center for School Mental Health [NCSMH] and Mental Health Technology Transfer Center [MHTTC] Network) supports state agencies and districts in understanding and implementing the core components of comprehensive school mental health. The curriculum is intended to be used with district teams that can influence, develop, and oversee school mental health systems at the school district and building levels.

The Curriculum aligns directly with the School Mental Health Quality Assessment (SMH-QA) on SHAPE (and its corresponding modules). The SMH-QA reflects the MTSS framework and incorporates positive behavioral interventions and supports as well as all of the other components of school mental health. States and districts that are using PBIS and/or ISF have also used the curriculum to enhance training.

**PBIS, ISF, and CSMHS are all represented in The National School Mental Health Curriculum.**

For more information, visit:

<https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/global-mhttc/school-mental-health-resources>

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<sup>1</sup> These example scenarios illustrate one type of logic and resulting decision on using a tool. They do not account for all unique alignment considerations or decisions to adopt a tool.

## References and Resources

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