Using Data to Improve School Mental Health Service Access: Identifying Barriers and Strengthening Existing Resources

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Premise

School staff need data on the proximal outcomes that they can <u>influence</u> to inform decision making

Project Goals

How many students, and which students, use mental health services and supports?

What barriers prevent students from accessing mental health services at school?

What school resources help to facilitate mental health service access?

Rationale

Nationally, only ~30% of youth with disorders receive mental health services (Green et al., 2013)

Youth accessing services more often (Merikangas et al., 2011):
◦ Are Non-Latino White
◦ Have parents who have completed more years of education
◦ Exhibit externalizing symptoms

Racial/ethnic disparities attenuate in school settings (Merikangas et al., 2011)
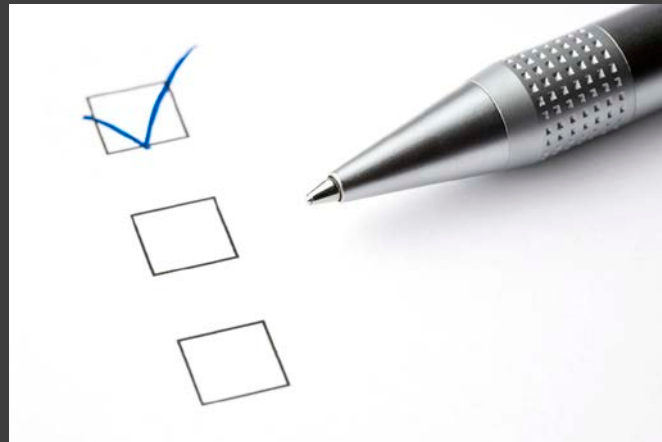
Surveillance Efforts

Focus on data on health and health risk behaviors

Procedure: anonymous, no skip-outs, all students

Rarely include self-report measures of mental health service use

◦ Questions that *are* included are untested and not validated

Adolescent Mental Health Support Scale (AMHSS)

Study 1
- Scale Development

Study 2
- Expert Review and Validation

Study 3
- Pilot with MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey

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Scale Development: Item Development

Search to identify candidate items
- Existing surveys on health and health risk behaviors
- Questions related to school-based services
- Literature review
  - 910 results
  - Found 16 articles with questions to add to our list

Total: 15 initial candidate items

Scale Development: Focus Groups

Sample/Procedure
- 2 middle schools, 3 high schools
- 33 students (6-9 students/group)
- Received $20 gift card
- 45-60 minutes

Protocol
- Describe mental health problems and how students get help
- Review and comment on potential survey questions

Category 1:
Desire for Help-Seeking

Did students want to speak with a mental health service provider about mental health challenges?

These questions are about emotional challenges or problems. Emotional challenges include things that make you feel sad, angry, stressed, or anxious, or that may make you have thoughts of hurting yourself.

During the past 12 months, did you want to talk to a school counselor, school therapist, or school psychologist about emotional challenges or problems? (Do not include talking about class scheduling or college or career preparation).
    O Yes
    O No
    O Not Sure

Category 1: Desire for Help-Seeking

Feedback
Did not know difference between "psychiatrist" and "therapist"
See school counselor for many things, including problems with classes, scheduling, college applications
Unsure if 12-months was the right length of time?
Is "want" the best term? Should it be "need"?
Suggested having a "not sure" option
Suggested adding a definition of "emotional challenge/problem"

Category 2:
Use of Services and Supports

Did students use mental health services and supports?

During the past 12 months, how many times did you talk with any of the following for help with emotional challenges or problems?

(Rated 0 times, 1 time, 2 or 3 times, 4 or more times)

School counselor, school therapist, or school psychologist (*Do not include talking about class scheduling or college or career preparation*)

School nurse

Another adult at school, like a teacher or other school staff

Therapist, psychologist, or other mental health professional outside of school

Parent, relative, or other adult outside of school

Friends around the same age as you

Coach or club advisor

Religious or faith leader, including a religious youth group leader or mentor

Crisis hotline/text line

Person or group on social media (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat)

Category 2:
Use of Services and Supports

Feedback
Suggested asking about "past 12 months" instead of "this school year" because survey is administered in October
Preferred grid format for response options
Suggested adding text lines, social media groups as supports
Discussed asking about number of times talked to someone vs. how often, because meetings are often irregular

Category 3:
Barriers to Service Use

What barriers prevented students from accessing school-based mental health services?

These statements are about seeking help for emotional challenges or problems from a counselor, therapist, or psychologist at school. How much do you agree or disagree with each statement about getting help at school?

Rated Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree
I don't know who to go to for help at school
I don't think counseling at school would help
I wouldn't have time or wouldn't want to miss class to get help
I should handle problems on my own
I would be too embarrassed or scared to talk about it
A school counselor/therapist might not understand me or the challenges I was having
I wouldn't want other students to know I was meeting with a school counselor/therapist
I wouldn't want my parent(s)/guardian(s) to know I was meeting with a school counselor/therapist
Teachers or other school staff might treat me differently or give me fewer opportunities at school
My parents wouldn't want me to get help at school because they would be worried I might be treated differently or given fewer opportunities

Category 3:
Barriers to Service Use

Feedback
Ask about personal barriers, or barriers that peers experience?
Suggested removing barriers irrelevant to school settings (e.g., cost of treatment)
Suggested adding barriers (e.g., busy schedule, missing classes)
Asked to clarify if barriers apply outside of school too
Discussed embarrassment as a key barrier

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Study 2: Expert Review

Identified two best question options following focus groups

Sample
- ◦ Mental health professionals in participating districts (N = 34)
- ◦ Mental health researchers (N = 6)

Procedures
- ◦ Reviewed 6 questions (2 in each of the 3 categories)
- ◦ Rated (Artino et al., 2014):
  - ◦ Understandability of question
  - ◦ Understandability of response options
  - ◦ Relevance of question to measuring adolescent service use

Feedback from School Staff

"Our population often wants to see someone but actually seeing someone (use) is often more difficult."

"One concern is that students often start with educational questions/concerns but then end up talking about MH issues as well. This might not be captured by this question."

"Many of the students I meet with are having a difficult time managing the stress of school. I think that aspect is missing from these question."

"Is the question look for school counselor and OUTSIDE therapist"

Feedback from Researchers

"Throughout the question/survey it might be good not to use the word "problem" perhaps for "emotional help" or to overcome an "emotional challenge" might be less permanent and negative."

"If student was hospitalized, particularly for an extended period of time, it may be difficult to answer the previous question regarding how many times they talked to mh professional."

"Not sure about the names of the mh professionals....but strikes me that you don't include psychologist (or school psychologist)."

"The less words the better. I don't think kids know the difference between all the different providers. However I know it is tough to balance making sure they mean a therapist and not a teacher/parent. Perhaps leave it as counselor or therapist?"

"excellent set of questions. wording very clear and thoughtful."

Study 2: Expert Review

	Understand Question	Understand Response Options	Relevance
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Desire for Help Seeking	4.21 (0.78)	4.48 (0.62)	3.91 (1.01)
Mental Health Service Use	4.26 (0.67)	3.97 (0.97)	4.24 (0.82)
Barriers to Service Use	4.38 (0.60)	4.47 (0.56)	4.56 (0.50)

All ratings on a scale of 1-5, with 5 indicating greater understandability and relevance

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MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey (MWAHS)

Initiative funded by the MetroWest Health Foundation, beginning in 2006

Large-scale biennial school-based census survey of middle and high school youth in 25 communities (more than 40,000 youth surveyed annually)

Primary goal is to inform community-level planning, education, and prevention efforts through monitoring trends and emerging health issues

Regional dataset informs the field of adolescent health

METROWEST HEALTH FOUNDATION

www.mwhealth.org

2018 MWAHS Survey Participants

All public middle and high schools in the MetroWest region

Middle and upper-middle income suburbs and small cities

Boston
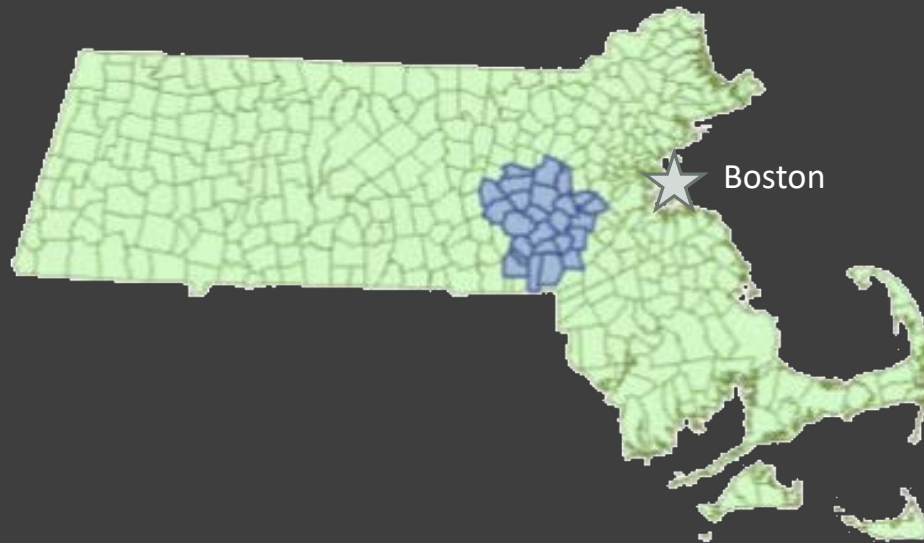
MetroWest School Demographics

	Mean (SD)
Number of students	849.8 (401.4)
Student-teacher ratio	12.3 (1.9)
% White	77.0 (12.8)
% First language not English	12.3 (12.9)
% English Language Learners	3.4 (4.9)
% with Disabilities	18.1 (11.9)
% Chronically absent	10.5 (10.1)

Study 3:
Pilot study to validate AMHSS

Sample
◦ Middle and high school students in 25 communities

◦ Middle School = 8,740 students (92% RR)
◦ High School = 19,683 students (88% RR)

Study 3:
Pilot study to validate AMHSS

Measures
- AMHSS
- Depressive symptoms question from YRBS (CDC, 2017)
- Suicidal ideation question from YRBS (CDC, 2017)
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder-2 (GAD-2; Kroenke et al., 2007)

- Students classified as having Any Internalizing symptoms if they reported depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, or suicidal ideation

Results: Help-seeking

During the past 12 months, did you want to talk to a school counselor, school therapist, or school psychologist about emotional challenges or problems? (*Do not include talking about class scheduling or college or career preparation*).

	MS	HS
Yes	13%	19%
No	78%	71%
Not Sure	9%	10%

Results: Service and Support Use

Saw 1+ Times	MS	HS
School counselor, etc		
School nurse		
Another adult at school		
Therapist, psychologist, etc. outside of school		
Parent or other adult outside of school		
Friends		
Coach or club advisor		
Religious or faith leader		
Crisis hotline/text line		
Social media		

Results: Service and Support Use

Saw 1+ Times	MS	HS
School counselor, etc	17%	17%
School nurse	5%	5%
Another adult at school	10%	13%
Therapist, psychologist, etc. outside of school	13%	17%
Parent or other adult outside of school	43%	44%
Friends	44%	53%
Coach or club advisor	4%	6%
Religious or faith leader	4%	4%
Crisis hotline/text line	1%	3%
Social media	12%	15%

Results: Barriers Scale

Exploratory principal components analysis indicated that scale was unidimensional

Reliability
- Cronbach's alpha = .875 for middle school
- Cronbach's alpha = .881 for high school

Results: Barriers

	MS	HS
I don't know who to go to for help at school		
I don't think counseling at school would help		
I wouldn't have time or wouldn't want to miss class to get help		
I should handle problems on my own		
I would be too embarrassed or scared to talk about it		
A school counselor/therapist might not understand me or the challenges I was having		
I wouldn't want other students to know I was meeting with a school counselor/therapist		
I wouldn't want my parent(s)/guardian(s) to know I was meeting with a school counselor/therapist		
Teachers or other school staff might treat me differently or give me fewer opportunities at school		
My parents wouldn't want me to get help at school because they would be worried I might be treated differently or given fewer opportunities		

Results: Barriers

% Agree or Strongly Agree	MS	HS
I don't know who to go to for help at school	18%	16%
I don't think counseling at school would help	31%	33%
I wouldn't have time or wouldn't want to miss class to get help	36%	45%
I should handle problems on my own	33%	38%
I would be too embarrassed or scared to talk about it	33%	34%
A school counselor/therapist might not understand me or the challenges I was having	35%	34%
I wouldn't want other students to know I was meeting with a school counselor/therapist	44%	41%
I wouldn't want my parent(s)/guardian(s) to know I was meeting with a school counselor/therapist	22%	25%
Teachers or other school staff might treat me differently or give me fewer opportunities at school	27%	23%
My parents wouldn't want me to get help at school because they would be worried I might be treated differently or given fewer opportunities	10%	10%

Preliminary Validity of AMHSS: Internalizing Symptoms

	With Internalizing Symptoms	Without Internalizing Symptoms
MS: Desire for Help-Seeking	35.1%	6.4%**
HS: Desire for Help-Seeking	39.7%	8.9%**
MS: Use of School MH Services	30.7%	10.3%**
HS: Use of School MH Services	29.2%	8.2%**

Preliminary Validity of AMHSS: Gender differences

	Females	Males
MS: Desire for Help-Seeking	18.4%	8.0%**
HS: Desire for Help-Seeking	30.0%	11.8%**
MS: Use of School MH Services	20.6%	12.2%**
HS: Use of School MH Services	23.0%	10.2%**

Preliminary Validity of AMHSS: Racial/ethnic differences

	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Other
MS: Desire for Help-Seeking	13.1	14.1	15.0**^	9.2^	13.9
HS: Desire for Help-Seeking	18.3	16.7^	22.9**^	18.9	21.9
MS: Use of School MH Services	16.3**^	17.7	18.6	10.1^	18.6
HS: Use of School MH Services	16.4	13.9	18.1	15.5	19.9

Preliminary Validity of AMHSS: Barriers

	Middle School (n=8740)			High School (n=19683)		
	Mean	SD	p value	Mean	SD	p value
Any Internalizing Problems						
1 or more	28.24	8.09	<.001	29.26	8.05	<.001
None	34.23	7.95		34.19	7.94	
Gender						
Female	31.56	8.31	<.001	31.46	8.09	<.001
Male	33.29	8.51		32.91	8.56	

Preliminary Validity of AMHSS: Barriers

	Middle School (n=8740)			High School (n=19683)		
	Mean	SD	p value	Mean	SD	p value
Race/ethnicity						
White	32.81	8.18	<.001	32.57	8.11	<.001
Asian	31.86	8.08		31.23	8.42	
Black/African American	31.09	9.46		31.27	9.29	
Latino/Hispanic	31.28	9.66		31.59	9.39	
Other/multiple	31.91	8.71		30.96	8.53	

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SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

School Mental Health Resources

Sample

- Interviewed school & district staff from 57 schools participating in the MetroWest Health Survey
- 45-60 minutes, audiotaped
- Participants received $50
- Collected data from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education on schools

Interview Topics

❖ Preventative Services

❖ Identification and Screening

❖ Availability of Providers

❖ Supports for Specific Student Groups

❖ Mental Health Supports

❖ Community Resources

❖ Staff Training

Preventative Services

	%
Established/existing SEL program	65%
SEL program developed by school/district	63%
SEL provided to ALL students	85%
School advisory	59%

Identification and Screening

	%
Screen for suicide or depression	53.8%
Anonymous reporting system	61.4%

Availability of Providers

	Mean (SD)
Student-to-mental health provider ratio (counselors, psychologists, social workers)	145.5 (62.2)

Supports for Students

Student Group	%
Gay Straight Alliance	87.0%
Group supporting students with disabilities	61.5%
Group supporting cultural diversity and or immigrants	64.7%

Mental Health Supports

	%
MTSS	75.9%
Provide Group Counseling	87.3%
Bridge program	43.6%
Sub separate classroom	44.4%

Community Resources

	%
Partners come on-site	70.2%
Partners are off-site	57.9%

Staff Training

	%
Identifying MH problems	14.3% None 40.8% Some 44.9% All
Mental health referrals	14.3% None 20.4% Some 65.3% All
Self-injury	14.3% None 67.3% Some 18.4% All
Suicide	18.4% None 40.8% Some 40.8% All

Next Steps

Test association between different school-level resources and individual-level use of mental health services

Test whether associations differ for subpopulations of youth

Identify actionable steps for schools to improve access to mental health services

Conclusions

❖ Able to capture mental health service use and barriers in a set of relatively brief questions that could be added to surveillance surveys

❖ There are key demographic differences in access to mental health services

❖ School district resources to address mental health service gaps range considerably and may have implications for actual receipt of services

Questions?

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