Supporting Students’ Mental Health in a Multi-Tiered Framework

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Abstract: Research provides robust evidence that students’ mental health is closely tied to their school behavior and academic achievement, and suggests critical developmental periods for prevention and intervention efforts. In addition to preventing and reducing mental health problems, fostering students’ subjective well-being (i.e., happiness) is essential to ensuring optimal outcomes. This presentation will convey best practices in the promotion of student complete mental health, through implementation of universal programs and practices that build social-emotional-behavioral competencies and prevent psychological problems, identification of students in need of supplemental services, and provision of evidence-based interventions to enhance the subjective well-being of all students and teachers in the classroom.

This workshop describes best practices in the promotion of all students’ emotional and behavioral health, in part to eradicate barriers to learning that stem from mental health problems. Empirical links between students’ mental health and academic success will be summarized. This research-based rationale for school mental health services suggests priority needs, as well as critical developmental periods for prevention and intervention efforts. Participants will learn best practice models for promoting student mental health through a multi-tiered framework that includes universal (Tier 1), targeted (Tier 2), and indicated/individual and crisis services (Tier 3). Addressing the Tier 1 level, participants will learn programs and practices to promote all children’s emotional well-being and reduce/prevent emotional and behavioral problems. Methods for evaluating the effectiveness of such programs and identifying students in need of additional mental health services will be described. At the Tier 2 level, participants will become familiar with example evidence-based options for time-limited programs for common mental health challenges. Planning for the Tier 3 level, participants will consider their school/district’s areas of relative strength and in need of development, and identify district personnel and community resources likely to be the most appropriate partners for various mental health services.

Learning Objectives:

1. How Complete Mental Health Links to Students’ Academic Success.

2. Knowledge of traditional and current conceptualizations of mental health (e.g., disease/distress model vs. comprehensive models of
“Complete Mental Health” from a positive psychology perspective that include indicators of wellness in addition to emotional distress).

3. Knowledge of studies that demonstrate links between students’ mental health (including happiness) and their academic achievement and schooling experiences.

4. Essential Features of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports to Promote Complete Mental Health: Knowledge of evidence-based programs and practices recommended for inclusion in a multi-tiered framework for school mental health that includes universal (Tier 1), targeted (Tier 2), and indicated/individual and crisis services (Tier 3).

5. Knowledge of assessment options, such as universal screening of student mental health, to systematically identify students for supplemental support through Tiers 2 and 3.

6. Knowledge of systems change considerations during implementation of MTSS for complete mental health, including creating school teams and partnerships, securing buy-in from key stakeholders, and data-based decision making.

Biography: Shannon Suldo, Ph.D., is a Professor in the School Psychology Program at the University of South Florida. She received her Ph.D. in School Psychology from the University of South Carolina in 2004. She is a Licensed Psychologist in the state of Florida and continues to provide school-based mental health services to youth in the Tampa area. She has extensive research and clinical experiences in school-based mental health services, including: establishing empirical links between student mental health and academic success; conceptualizing and measuring student mental health in a dual-factor model that considers psychopathology and well-being; evidence-based positive psychology interventions for promoting positive indicators of student well-being; schoolwide strategies to identify youth with mental health problems; and factors that limit and facilitate school psychologists’ provision of school mental health services. She also studies stress, coping strategies, and mental health of high school students in accelerated courses, and is Principal Investigator of two large federal grant to identify and facilitate student-level and environmental factors that predict academic and emotional success among students in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses. She has published more than 60 studies that convey findings from her research on how to assess and promote complete mental health. She is the author of Promoting Student Happiness: Positive Psychology Interventions in Schools, a 2016 book within the Guilford Practical Intervention in the Schools Series.