Afraid of Opening Pandora's Box? How to Address Student Needs After Mental Health Screening in Schools
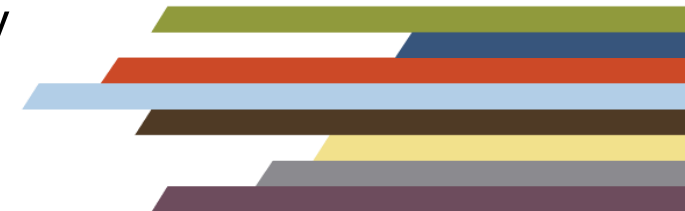
Presenter: Elizabeth Connors, PhD
Moderator: Terah Kalk, MPH
School Mental Health Initiative
Southeast Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (MHTTC)
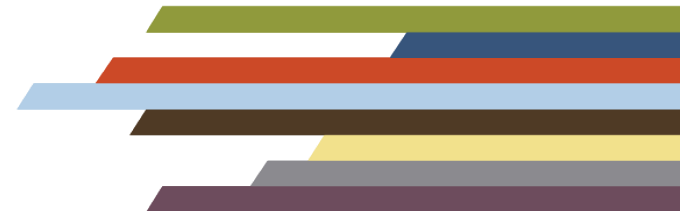Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University
August 3, 2022

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Southeast Mental Health Technology Transfer Center
Alabama | Florida | Georgia | Kentucky | Mississippi | North Carolina | South Carolina | Tennessee

About the Southeast Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (MHTTC)

The Southeast MHTTC is located at the Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University.

Serve states in HHS Region IV: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

Our Mission: To promote the implementation and sustainability of evidence-based mental health services in the Southeastern United States.

Our Vision: Widespread access to evidence-based mental health services for those in need.

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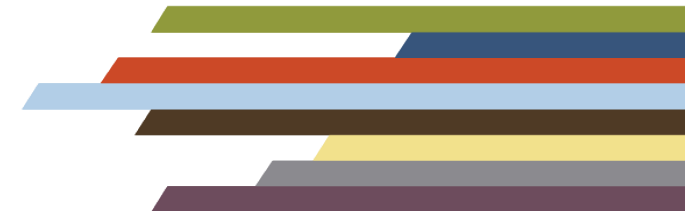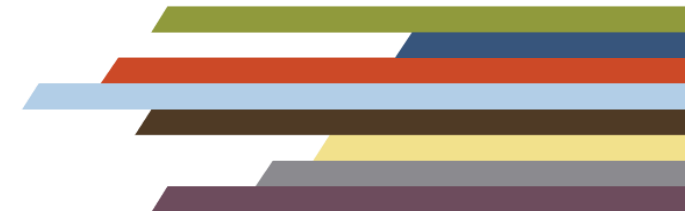
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Presenter

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Learning Objectives

1. Increase understanding of how to prepare for and conduct mental health screening efforts in schools that protect against identifying more need than schools can address.

2. Increase familiarity with strategies to address student mental health needs for those who screen in for potentially needing supports.

3. Promote cross-state networking and shared learning about how to address student mental health needs after screening in schools.

Agenda

➢Mental Health Screening Defined

➢Common Barriers and Concerns

➢Before Screening: Proactive Best Practices

➢After Screening: Handling Positive Screens

➢Field Example: Cumberland County Schools, NC
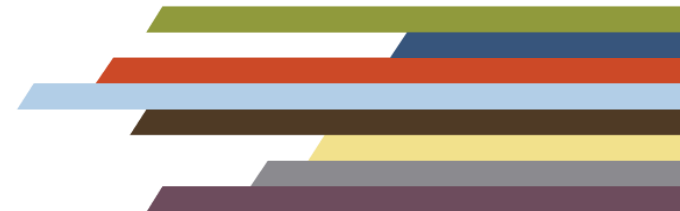
Mental Health Screening Defined

What Is School Mental Health Screening?

Using a tool or process employed with an entire population, such as a school's student body, **to identify student strengths and needs.** Screening is often used to identify students **at risk for a mental health or substance use concern.**
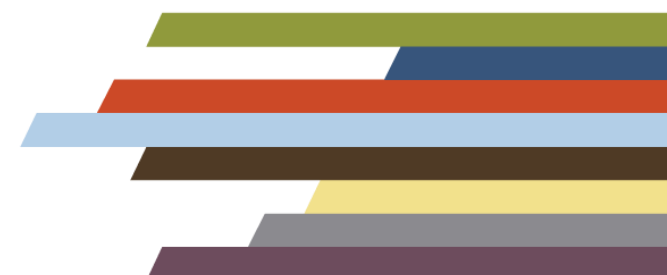
Why Screen?

- Support a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS).
- Inform prevention and early intervention strategies.
- Identify concerns specific to grades, classrooms, or educators.
- Identify students with the highest well-being.
- Identify students at risk for mental illness or harm to self or others.
- Improve access to mental health supports.
- Economically sound.

Common Barriers and Concerns

Reflection:

What concerns do you anticipate when implementing school mental health screening and how might you address them?

Considerations

- Capacity
- Community buy-in
- Parent consent
- Screening purpose

Addressing Barriers

The identified need will exceed our capacity.	Our community doesn't like the idea.	Obtaining consent from parents will exceed our capacity.	What will we screen for?
Set triaging data rules in advance	Involve multiple stakeholders in planning	Use passive consent and opt-out procedures	Obtain input on key focus areas to start with
Review existing resources/capacity	Use existing community and parent forums	Share a consistent message in multiple formats	Consider different measures by grade levels, schools, etc
Review surveillance data	Start by screening for resilience and strengths	Engage parents in developing your message	Use the SHAPE Screening and Assessment Library
Start small then adapt and scale up	Start small then adapt and scale up	Start small then adapt and scale up	Start small then adapt and scale up

Universal Screening in Action

2021-2022 SY

Natasha Scott, Ed.D, MSW

Executive Director, Student Services

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Our Commitment: Every Student

Collaborative ★ Competitive ★ Successful

Universal Screening Process

★ **Screening instrument:** Behavior Intervention Monitoring Assessment System (BIMAS)

★ **Sample:** 23/89 schools

★ **Data Collection:**
  – **Timing:** BOY, MOY, EOY
  – **Procedure:** Elementary (K-5) - completed by the teacher, Secondary (6-12) completed by the student

★ **Preparation:**
  – Training on universal screening and how to use the instrument
  – Understanding the data

CUMBERLAND
COUNTY SCHOOLS

Handling Positive Screens

★ Student Services staff followed up with any student that expressed thoughts of self-harm.

  – District suicide protocol followed as needed

★ Parents were contacted for positive screens.

★ Linkage and referrals to school and community resources as appropriate.

Lessons Learned

- ★ Start small and be strategic.
  - Resource mapping, Standard Treatment Protocol
- ★ Allow adequate time to follow up with students with positive screens (i.e. don't screen on Fridays, start early in the morning, stagger your scheduling, etc.).
- ★ Use all of the resources available to you.
- ★ Partner with parents/guardians.
- ★ It's scary, but worth it!

CUMBERLAND
COUNTY SCHOOLS

Before Screening: Proactive Best Practices

To what extent did your district/school use best practices for **mental health screening, planning, and implementation**?

Best Practices:

- Include students and families in the screening process.

- Use a selection process for a screening tool that considers reliability, feasibility, cost, and fit with the goals of screening.

- Share information about screening in multiple formats.

- Inform students and families about screening procedures.

- Roll out initial screening efforts gradually.

- Respond to risk of harm to self and others immediately.

- Have a process to assess screening results to triage students to appropriate services.

National School Mental Health Implementation Guidance Modules

Start Small

Build a Foundation

Assemble a team:

- School administrators and staff
- Community
- Students
- Family

Build a Foundation

Generate Engagement and Support

- Gather input from several groups:
  - ✓Focus groups
  - ✓Parent/staff meetings
  - ✓Feedback cards
- Strategize how your goals fit in with other initiatives or goals in your school/district
- Consider how students are currently being identified for MH services and the implications for service provision.

National School Mental Health Implementation
Guidance Modules
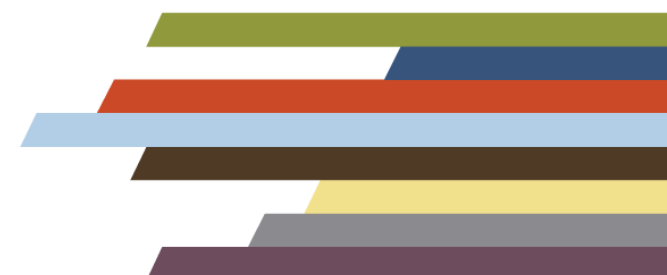
Build a Foundation

Cultural Considerations

- Complex stress related to poverty, immigration, language barriers
- Cultural beliefs about mental health and how concerns should be addressed
- Marginalized and underserved groups
- Screening more acceptable across cultural groups when strengths-based

"Interpreters, cultural brokers, and community liaisons should be available, utilized, and consulted with frequency in order to minimize miscommunication and improve collaboration with family members across key stakeholders."
*(Bertone et al., 2018)*

Needs Assessment and Resource Mapping

- Assess student mental health needs.
- Assess student mental health strengths.
- Use needs assessment results to select, plan, and implement services and supports.
- Conduct resource mapping to identify existing services and supports.
- Use resource map to select, plan, and implement services and supports.
- Align existing services and supports.

Needs Assessment Topics

- 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
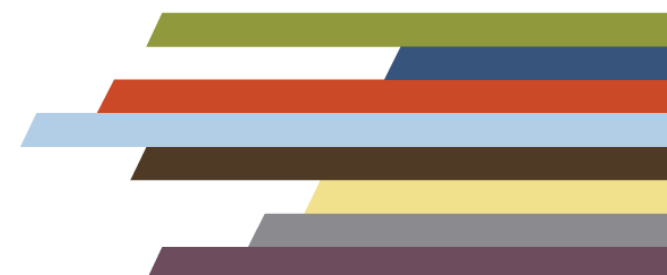
# How Do Needs Assessment and Resource Mapping Fit Together?

- Needs assessment identifies the pressing strengths, needs, and challenges in a system.

- Resource mapping offers a clear representation of resources available to address identified needs or enhance identified strengths.

School Mental Health Quality Guide: Needs Assessment and Resource Mapping

Provides guidance to advance school mental health quality and sustainability
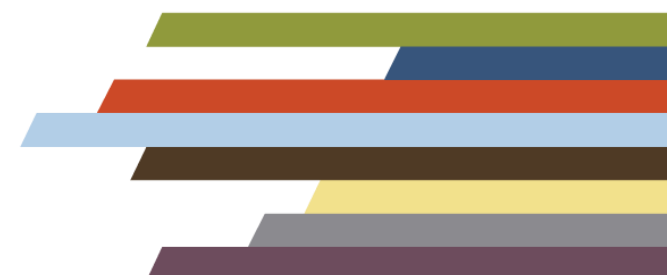
Includes:
- Background
- Best practices
- Action steps
- Examples from the field
- Resources
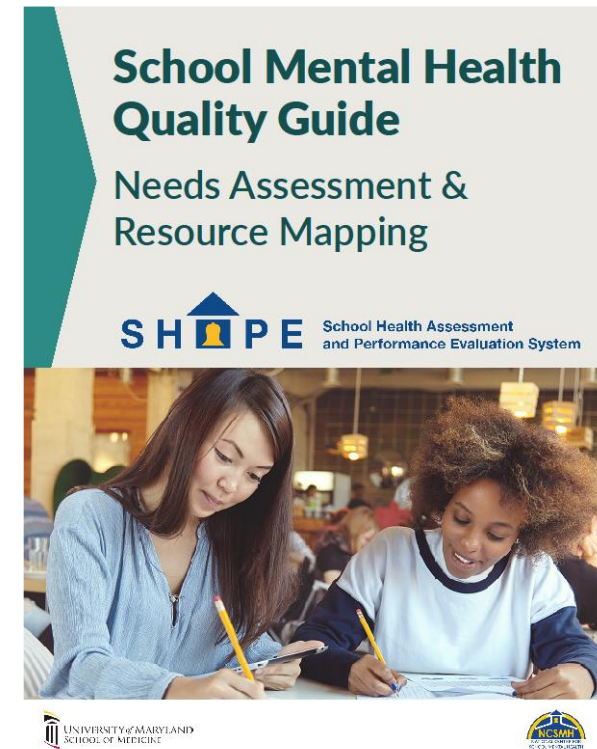
NCSMH, 2020

Develop Administration Processes

- Who to screen
  - Pilot with a small group of students
  - Collect feedback from students, families and staff to inform modifications

- When to screen
  - Consider advisory or home room time

- Staff to support screening
  - Who will administer the screening
  - Provide information scripts for staff to read including potential trouble-shooting tips
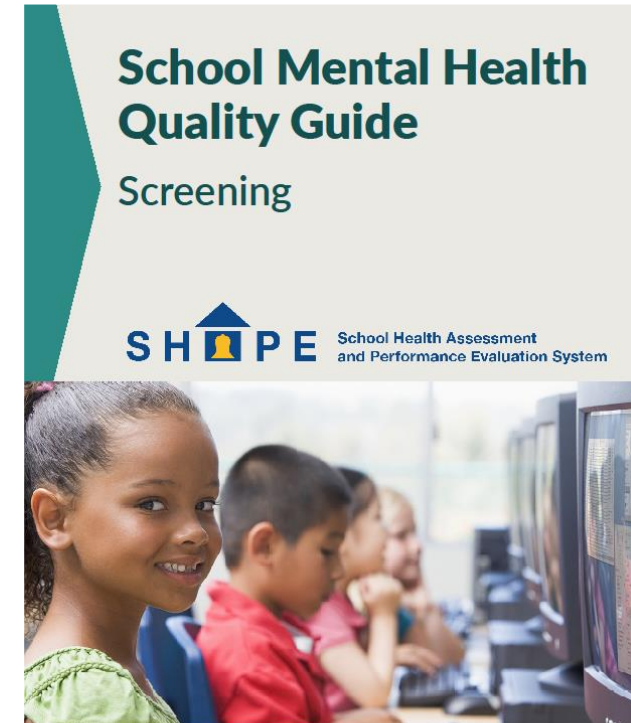
School Mental Health Quality Guide: Screening

Provides guidance to advance school mental health quality and sustainability

Includes:
- Background
- Best practices
- Action steps
- Examples from the field
- Resources

NCSMH, 2020

After Screening: Handling Positive Screens

Develop Follow-Up Processes

- **Tiered approach to follow up**
  - Resource map of school and community supports and services
  - Determine interventions that will be implemented for students at different levels of risk

- **Follow-up schedule**
  - High risk- same day
  - Moderate risk- within a week
  - Low risk- communicate findings to staff, students, and parents within a reasonable timeframe (e.g., one month).
  - Processes to follow up with caregivers and school staff

- Alert crisis teams and local community mental health providers to be on call in advance of screenings

National School Mental Health Implementation
Guidance Modules
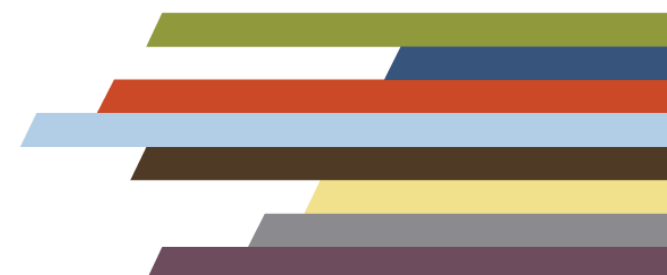
Communicating Positive Screens to Students and Families

- Positive screen indicates *potential* need for early intervention or treatment, requiring follow-up assessment/evaluation
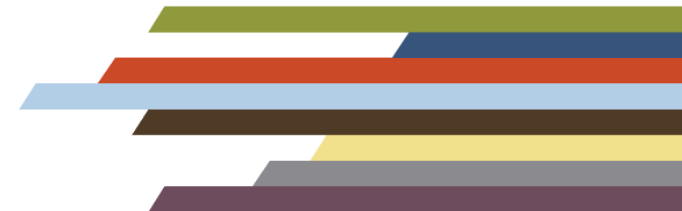 - *Example*: School nurse calls to tell you your student failed the routine vision screening at school and should follow-up with optometrist to see if there is an actual vision concern

- Follow-up evaluation and treatment is the *family's choice*

- Keep in mind the student/family did not self-refer to an intervention → proceed with care

Options to Improve Access to Care

Map telehealth services

- National Network of Child Psychiatry Access Programs: https://www.nncpap.org/
- Developing a School-Based Telehealth Strategy: https://telehealth.hhs.gov/providers/school-based-telehealth/developing-a-school-based-telehealth-strategy/

Consider community/university/hospital partnerships

- National School Mental Health Best Practices: Module 2 Teaming https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/southeast-mhttc/product/national-school-mental-health-best-practices-module-2-teaming

Strengthen referral pathways and practices

- WI SMH Referral Pathways Modules: https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/mental-health/framework/referral-pathways
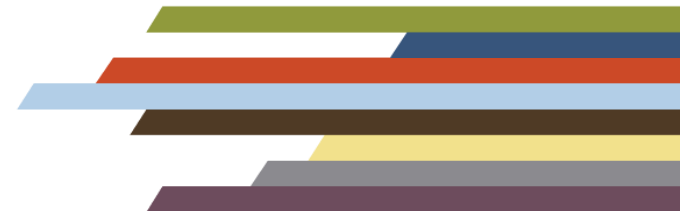
To what extent did your district/school use best practices to **make effective referral processes to school-based mental health services**?

Best Practices

- Use a current team resource directory.

- Provide clear information for students and families to self-refer.

- Promote direct contact with the school-based provider.

- Use referral feedback meetings or forms.

National School Mental Health Implementation Guidance Modules

To what extent did your district/school use best practices to **make effective referrals to community-based mental health services**?

Best Practices

- Use current community resource map
- Clear referral process to include:
  - Family meeting to review needs, options, and releases of information
  - Confirm referral, service availability, and warm handoff
  - Referral instructions and contact information
  - Discuss potential barriers to follow-through and how to overcome
  - Follow-up meetings with provider for ongoing communication

Coordinating with Community Partners

- **Who screens?**
  - Community-employed staff typically need active consent

- **Where will screening data be stored?**
  - School records are protected by FERPA; Community records are protected by HIPAA

- **What time frame(s) are best for making referrals to partners?**
  - Know cycles of demand for mental health services (e.g., winter holidays)
  - Stay in communication and alert your partners in advance of screenings
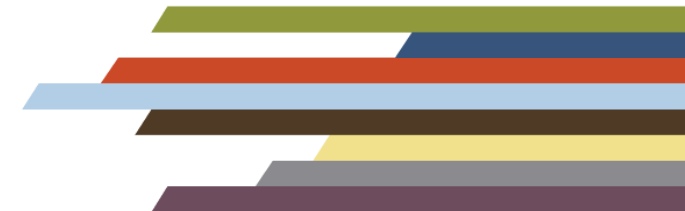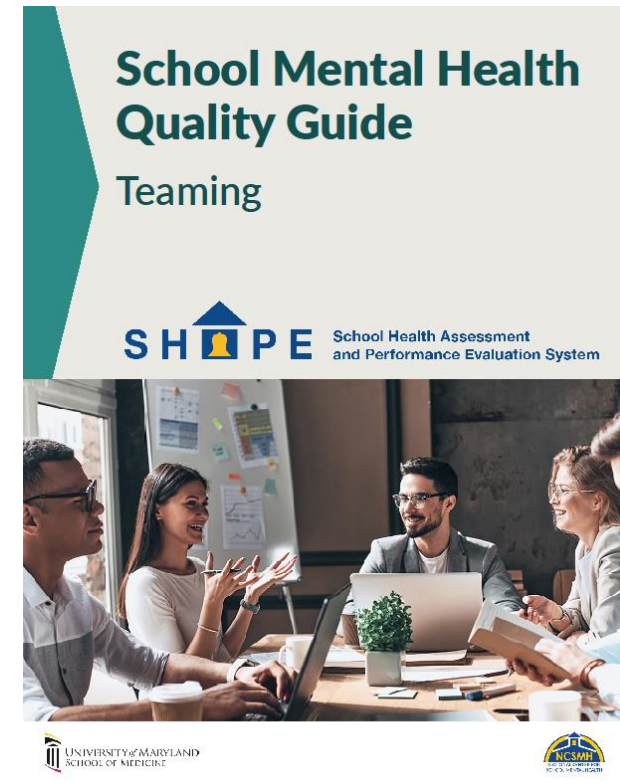
School Mental Health Quality Guide: Teaming

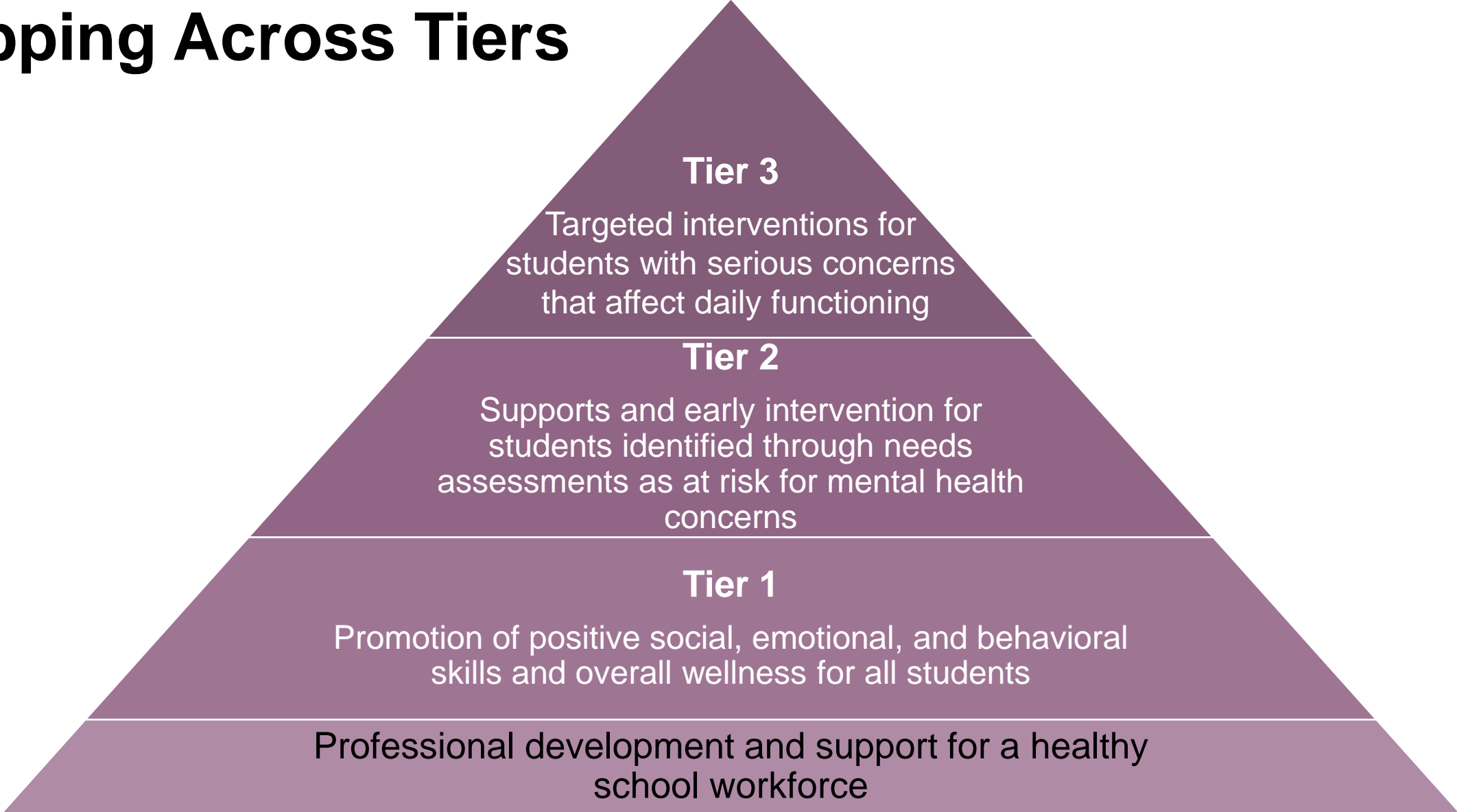Provides guidance to advance school mental health quality and sustainability

Includes:
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NCSMH, 2020

National School Mental Health Implementation Guidance Modules

Mapping Across Tiers

Tier 3
Targeted interventions for students with serious concerns that affect daily functioning

Tier 2
Supports and early intervention for students identified through needs assessments as at risk for mental health concerns

Tier 1
Promotion of positive social, emotional, and behavioral skills and overall wellness for all students

Professional development and support for a healthy school workforce

Thinking Beyond Tier 3

- Early Intervention (Tier 2) Groups

- Mentoring programs

- Faith-based counseling or support

- Classroom / Grade Level Presentations

- Tier 1 Programming for Universal Skill Development

"If screening indicates a high prevalence of a specific need, schools should consider bolstering universal mental health promotion/prevention (Tier 1) and early intervention (Tier 2) supports."
-Connors et al., 2022, pp.19

Source: Connors, E. H., Moffa, K., Carter, T., Crocker, J., Bohnenkamp, J. H., Lever, N. A., & Hoover, S. A. (2022). Advancing mental health screening in schools: Innovative, field-tested practices and observed trends during a 15-month learning collaborative. *Psychology in the Schools*, *59*(6), 1135-1157.

Free download: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9307132/pdf/nihms-1766593.pdf
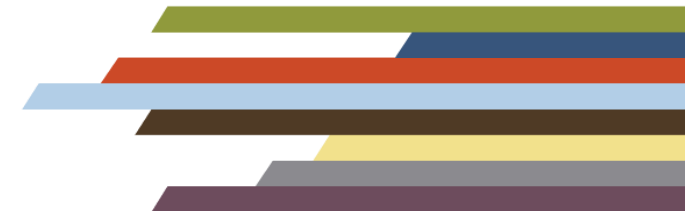
School Mental Health Implementation Guidance Modules

Slide decks and recorded presentations for all 8 modules can be found here:

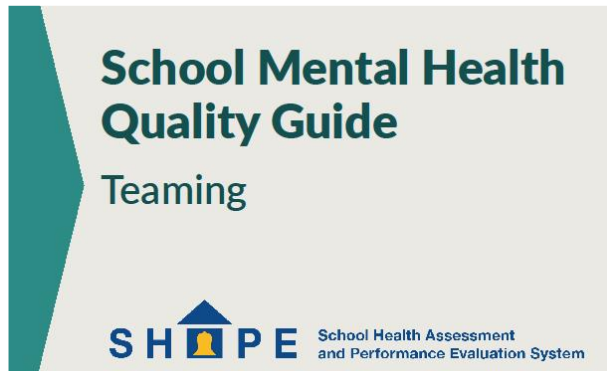https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/global-mhttc/school-mental-health-best-practices-always-and-now-learning-series

Resource index for the 8 modules, developed by the Southeast MHTTC, can be found here:

https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/southeast-mhttc/product/national-school-mental-health-best-practices-implementation

School Mental Health Quality Guides and Free Resources

https://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/SHAPE/

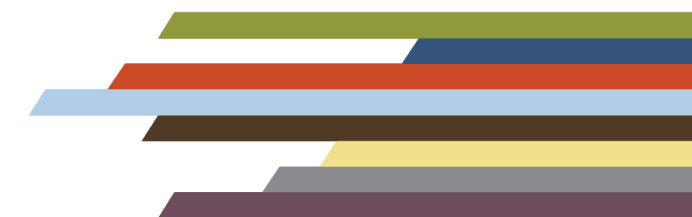https://www.theshapesystem.com

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