

LEVERAGING EXISTING RESOURCES TO SUPPORT SCHOOL RESPONDER MODEL IMPLEMENTATION

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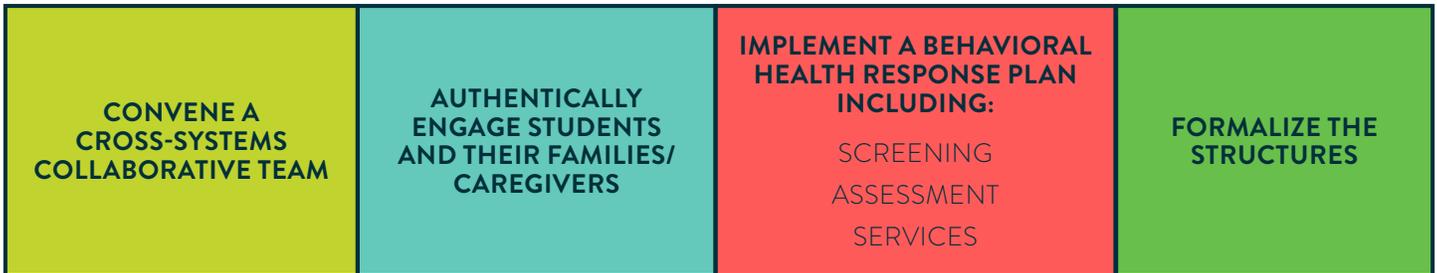
For many schools, adding another initiative like the school responder model can seem daunting. However, school responder models are easily implemented and sustained by leveraging existing resources and partnerships. Model implementation does not require significant amounts of funding, and can be integrated into existing school efforts, like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). In addition, school responder models are aligned with other targeted initiatives, like trauma-informed classrooms and restorative practices.

Supporting Students with School Responder Models

The National Center for Youth Opportunity and Justice (NCYOJ) has been working with schools designing and implementing school responder models for over a decade. Many of the schools working with NCYOJ have successfully integrated their school responder models into their learning environments and disciplinary practices.

A school responder model is an alternative to traditional school discipline designed to support students with mental health conditions, trauma exposures, or substance use disorders. This framework aims to identify these students, link them to necessary clinical services, and keep them in school and out of the juvenile justice system.

The essential, core components of a school responder model are to:



In two of the states where school responder models originate, encouraging outcomes were documented.

40%

IN OHIO:

There was a 40% decrease in likelihood of additional infraction after participation in a school responder model in youth referred for behavior or truancy issues.

47%

IN CONNECTICUT:

47% more students have been connected to behavioral health services since implementation of their school responder model, the Connecticut School-Based Diversion Initiative.

Identifying Community Needs and Existing Resources

For Ohio, Connecticut, and other states, districts, and schools implementing school responder models, each began model design and implementation by identifying what supports were currently in place and what supports were still needed to best serve students with mental health conditions, trauma exposures, or substance use disorders. This landscape analysis, or environmental scan, allows administrators to get a bird’s eye view of what resources are accessible and which ones are lacking. Using data to detect where the greatest needs lie is essential, as administrators and staff may not be aware of what is already in place in their schools or communities, or what could be available from local entities.

Once asset mapping is completed, convening community stakeholders, such as business owners, members of the faith-based organizations, community mental health providers, or local social service agencies, together to learn about what resources they have available and what they can offer is advantageous. More often than not, community partners are ready and able to collaborate with their local district or school to provide support in many useful ways. They typically have different sources of funding or programming that can be offered in a school. Even though it takes time to build trust and learn to speak the same language, establishing these local partnerships can be a tremendous benefit to students, their families, and staff in your school.

It is essential to highlight an often-neglected partner in school initiatives, the families. Parents or caregivers can easily be dismissed or forgotten with the assumption they are too busy or uninterested in being involved. However, with the right invitation and environment, these stakeholders can assist in filling some of the identified areas of need as well. Families must have a seat at the table as members of the team of partners. Developing a unified front strengthens the fabric of the community.

Leveraging Available Resources

Those schools implementing school responder models note that there are numerous opportunities to bring in provisions and resources for young people in the building.

With the passage of the Federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December of 2016, there are funds available to education entities to support the “non-cognitive factors” that impact student learning. This new law allows and encourages educators to consider external influences that can impede school success and conditions for learning. ESSA opened the door to provide more resources to schools, especially those in poorer communities. Each State Department of Education was required to submit a plan denoting how they were going to implement ESSA throughout their local districts.¹² As part of their use of Title II-B funds, schools can use monies to provide professional development for teachers, including topics such as social emotional learning (SEL) or becoming trauma-informed. Enhancing the knowledge and skill set of educators through these trainings can help to meet students’ needs, especially in schools where there is limited availability of support staff, such as social workers or counselors.

Not only can schools benefit from the expansion of funds through the ESSA plan at the federal and state levels, they can utilize local partnerships to address the unmet needs of students. It undergirds the old adage that it takes a village to raise a child. Being creative, collaborative, and taking advantage of all that surrounds the school can help it feel rich in resources.

Practical Tips for Administrators

- Use Title IV Part A and E funds of the ESSA to fund student support staff’s use of screening tools like the GAIN-SS, SAEBRS, or another relevant tool for the student population
- Apply Title II-B of the ESSA for staff professional development on topics relevant to SRMs, such as mental health, trauma, family engagement, or adolescent development
- Coordinate with your state to utilize the Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) benefit through Medicaid to provide prevention services
- Utilize SAMHSA block grants for funding to implement evidence-based prevention and treatment services for students with SUD or SED. SAMHSA’s block grants are noncompetitive grants that provide funding to states for substance use and mental health services.
- Seek opportunities to partner and apply for available federal and state funding to initiate a school responder model, such as the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) STOP School Violence Grant Program or Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program (JMHCPC) for eligible units of local government
- Develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with a local community mental health provider(s) to provide on-site services if you have a shortage of social workers and counselors in school. You can also use this MOU to arrange for triaging arrangements for your students.
- Garner student feedback and input into your school responder model structure (i.e. convening a student advisory council)
- Collaborate with local law enforcement/school security to support and sustain school responder model methodologies
- Capitalize on social service agencies or other community partners’ abilities to bring in grant opportunities and resources to the school. Team up with these community organizations to write grants to support your efforts.

1. To learn more about these plans, please visit the U.S. Department of Education at <https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/statesubmission.html>.