

Professional School Counseling



[Universal Mental Health Screening: Steps for School Counselors through Multidisciplinary Teaming](#)

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School counselors collaborate with multidisciplinary teams to implement universal mental health screening (UMHS) in schools and this work is especially pertinent in light of the U.S. K-12 mental health crisis. As the school counseling UMHS literature is emerging, there is a need to expand this existing literature, particularly to meet students' mental health concerns. This study examined the qualitative experiences of school counselors and other multidisciplinary UMHS team members implementing screening.

UMHS provides early identification and intervention for school-based mental health concerns. Researchers conducted focus groups and sought out school counselors as well as other multidisciplinary, school-based UMHS team members, to reflect UMHS as a collaborative, team-based approach. This study was designed to provide practicing school counselors with specific UMHS steps organized by the Center for School Mental Health (2018) and to provide a framework for successful implementation of the UMHS.

The study offers several suggestions for practicing school counselors.

Practicing school counselors and administrators examine the political landscape in their school/district: How does change occur? Who is responsible for making decisions? Who influences these decision-makers? Are decisions made by superintendents, schoolboards, or building principals? Are decisions influenced by city councils or parents/families/caregivers? After gaining support for UMHS, school counselors assist in developing a multidisciplinary UMHS team—demonstrating their expertise in student development, mental health and data, and use their ongoing relationships with students, families and other school partners, such as administrators, teachers, and community providers (e.g., clinical mental health counselors). School counselors are mindful that UMHS teams are culturally sustaining and affirming—ensuring the student and family cultures are represented, and their voices are prioritized on the team.

School counselors understand the cultures and background of their students, families and community members, and ask: Does UMHS benefit all students equitably? Could UMHS harm some students?

After assessing how decisions are made, school counselors tailor their advocacy toward communicating how UMHS can address leaders' existing initiatives and priorities.

School counselors consider student and family demographics and cultures when determining screeners. School counselors can ask: What screeners are normed on populations like those at my school? This includes students across racial/ethnic groups, those who are multilingual, receive special education services/section 504 accommodations, and other demographics.

School counselors consider how the school will gather input from and communicate with families and community partners. How can school counselors gain family/guardian permission and buy-in—and listen to their concerns and recommendations?

Future research could also be conducted with more diversity across participants (e.g., more secondary participants, males, and those from a range of racial/ethnic backgrounds).