

Multi-Tiered Approaches to Preventing Bullying and Suicide: Promoting Digital Wellness and Supporting Schools

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Alexis Kaigler: Good afternoon, everybody. Welcome to today's webinar, sponsored by the Children's Safety Network. Today's webinar will be focused on multi-tiered approaches to preventing bullying and suicide, promoting digital wellness, and supporting schools.

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I'll hand it over to Caitlin to give us some technical announcements.

Children's Safety Network: Hi everyone, welcome. I have a few technical tips for you today. First, the quality of your audio depends on the speed of your internet connection, so if the audio is choppy, please find a more stable internet connection, or listen over the phone by dialing one of the phone numbers found in the Zoom invitation.

All participants are muted, but you can submit questions throughout the event using the Q&A button at the bottom of your screen, and we will address those questions in the discussion portion of our webinar later on.

For captions, please click the caption button at the bottom of your screen. Sometimes that's what is within the More icon, which is three dots at the bottom of your screen. And we will start... we will be sharing our resources, recording, and slides within the next two weeks posted to our website for you to all access as well. Back to you, Alexis.

Alexis Kaigler: Thank you. Well, hello everybody again. My name is Alexis Kegler, and I'm happy to serve as today's moderator. I'm the Partnerships Lead at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Violence Prevention. I'm also a member of the Children's Safety Now Alliance.

So, we're at the end of Suicide Prevention Month, and I know this is a time when many of us do increase awareness around suicide prevention and sharing effective approaches to suicide prevention. So, we hope that you learn some things today that will help in that work.

Recently, CDC came out with some new data on suicide rates.

That data showed that between 2018 to 2023, suicide prevention, suicide rates were stable. It also showed that there were some increases in some groups.

But there were some decreases. That data showed that there was a 7% decrease among young people 10 to 24 years old. So that's some promising, results that we are moving in the right direction, regarding some people, and we hope today that you learn, some tips that will really help in your suicide prevention work and your bullying prevention work.

I am now going to introduce, our panelists today. We have several, really distinguished panelists today that we hope you learn some valuable information.

So, Shay Futsman will be joining us today, excuse me, Shay Function, Futsman will be joining us today. He's a behavioral health expert and senior research scientist. He has extensive experience in adolescent health and development, on multi-tiered systems of support and substance misuse prevention. Through his leadership of EDC's Massachusetts Multi-Tiered System of Support Academy, Flexman guides schools and districts in building and sustaining strong systems to improve students' learning outcomes

Health and mental health.

Richard Fournier leads EDC's direct service work with states, districts, and schools to improve students' education and health outcomes. He specializes in advancing policy and leadership that promotes citizenship.

Character Academic Success, and well-being. Richard is a subject matter expert for EDC's Massachusetts Multi-Tiered System of Support Academy, an advisor to EDC's school suicide prevention work with North Central Health Services in Indiana.

And an education and well-being consultant for the school district of Philadelphia. He's also a licensed superintendent, former teacher, and researcher.

Shawna Haight-Jones is a Senior Prevention Specialist with the Suicide Prevention Resource Center. She provides support and develops resources on a public health approach to suicide prevention.

And our last presenter, Sherry Kestner-Schneider, is an expert in adolescent health and school health. She leads initiatives focused on survey research, program evaluation, intervention design, and training and technical assistance. Her content expertise in adolescent health and risk behaviors includes bullying, cyberbullying.

social media use, substance misuse, and mental health. She leads EDC's Metro West Adolescent Health Survey and provides technical assistance to school districts in using student survey data to inform educational efforts, prevention programming, and policymaking.

So we will now hear from all of our presenters today, and just as a reminder, you can type in questions in the Q&A section, and we will answer that at the end of the presentation. So now I'm going to hand it over to our first presenter, Shai.

Shai Fuxman: Hi, everyone, and good afternoon. So I'm going to be providing a brief, introduction to today's topic, which is how to take a multi-tiered systems approach to mental health, which we will then apply to suicide prevention and bullying prevention, as well as digital well-being.

So why take a systems approach? I love using this metaphor of when you go to a store, a furniture store, like IKEA, where you go, for example, you see a dresser that you love, you pick the box, you come home with a box, you open the box.

And what do you see? The image on the left. It's a bunch of pieces, you know, the wood panels and the screws and the washers. You don't have a dresser. What you have is a bunch of different pieces.

The process of creating a system, when you put everything together to create a dresser, that's the critical process to actually create one cohesive system that is what you actually want.

So that's kind of the same idea with MTSS, multi-tier system of support, and specifically for mental health.

One of the challenges that school districts face is that a lot of the mental health supports are siloed, are individual, one-time, or very specific types of support that are not well coordinated. So MTSS helps us put them all together into one cohesive mental health system, much like you would with a dresser.

So, this is what it looks like when you open a box of mental health supports in the district. Instead of seeing wooden panels and screws and washers, you see a lot of different programs.

If we were in person, one of the... when I put this slide, one of the questions I always ask people who work in school districts is, how many of these programs or initiatives do you have in your district?

And oftentimes, most people in the audience will raise their hand for multiple of these initiatives. And then I ask... the next question is how many people feel like this is exactly what those services look like, which is this messy interconnection, interrelated series of, of services that are not always well,

well, coordinated. You know, oftentimes people not say, yeah, that's exactly what it looks like.

So what MTSS allows us to do is to take this big mess of a bunch of different mental health services and supports, and organize them in a way that focuses on the whole child, that focuses on the relationship between the

Every child, their peers, and their educators in a way that supports promoting positive mental health

and when needed, to identify and address mental health challenges. And that's what MTSS is about, and that's why it's important to think about MTSS as a way to organize initiatives. One of the things we oftentimes hear from school districts when we first come in and start talking about MTSS,

is we don't need one more initiative. MTSS is not a new initiative, it's just a way to organize services. So, how do you do that?

This is what MTSS looks like, and just a very quick background about MTSS. The concept of MTSS is really borrowed from three different fields. Many of you might be familiar with it, depending on what field you come from.

So in education, we have the concept of response to intervention, which is also that kind of three-tiered pyramid, which was focused specifically on academics.

Specifically, it was about how do we help students make sure that everyone gets high-quality education, academic education, through Tier 1, but also how do we support those kids who are falling behind in math or literacy? In addition, there's also PBIS, Positive Behaviors Interventions and supports.

which is also organized in that pyramid. And that was a different concept, although really following the same idea of three tiers. And those of you who might be from the public health field, you're probably familiar with the Institute of Medicine, IOM's Continuum of Care, which looks at, promotion, prevention.

Treatment, and recovery. And within prevention, you have universal prevention, you have indicated and selective prevention.

The idea that you want, you know, everyone needs universal prevention, but some people, depending on their risk factors, might need additional supports. Same idea here with MTSS, which kind of grabs these principles across all three of those frameworks.

And organize them in a way that, again, addresses the whole child, both from an academic and non-academic supports in schools.

Obviously, today we're focusing on mental health, so we're going to be talking about how MPSS is focused on supporting students' mental health. So this is the diagram. There's a lot here. What I'm going to do over the next couple of slides is take you through each one of these elements step by step.

And so why do we need that? Just before we go into the individual, elements. So this is, a visual that I like to show to kind of explain why we need to have an MTSS approach to mental health.

So if you look to your left, the first block, that blue block, mental and behavioral health promotion. That's the universal effort that we... that schools,

Are increasingly interested in helping students develop those social and emotional skills and competencies that can, increase resiliency, that can help them make healthy decisions.

All students need that.

However, at the same time, some students, depending on what happens on the right side of their life, meaning the right side of this diagram, might need additional supports. So students who might have mental health diagnoses, like mental health... like, depression or, anxiety, or children who experience trauma, and or students who experience acute or chronic stress for various reasons, or any kinds of other risk factors, that could be individual, based on the family, peers, community, etc. Based on that level of risk factor, they might need additional supports beyond the blue box, beyond the universal supports.

And that's where we have those additional tiers that are added as needed, for each individual student.

So now we're going to go into each element individually.

So, Tier 1, again, that's universal. It's what we want to make sure every single student who walks into your school receives. That can include explicit mental health instruction.

So there's a big movement in K-12 education in the United States to move into more mental health literacy, especially into health education classes. How do we help students understand how to manage stress?

how to self-regulate, how to identify and manage emotions. This includes social-emotional skills, but also includes better understanding our mental health.

Just like we teach children to wash their hands, get proper sleep, eat nutritional meals, because that's important for physical health, we want to make sure we're educating students about mental health as well.

It could also include school-wide and classroom-based practices. So, teachers greeting students and developing meaningful relationships with every single child in the classroom, that's Tier 1. That's helping them develop those meaningful, productive relationships, which can also then enable them to ask for help.

What we call help-seeking behaviors, build confidence, which, again, are all protective factors against, risky, behaviors.

It could also be school-wide initiatives, such as promoting, positive behavior expectations.

Integration of well-being skills into academic instruction, so how do we talk to students about understanding how to, identify and manage emotions through their ELA, through their language arts books, for example, or how do they learn collaboration skills, through science and math projects?

And lastly, universal screeners, having a way to screen all students for mental health needs. Obviously, only certain students will be screened in, and that's where you get into the additional tiers, but we want all students to have that initial screening to make sure that we are identifying those kids who need additional support. So that's all that Tier 1.

In addition to Tier 1,

We want to make sure that we're providing some target supports, and you'll see, obviously, there's Tier 3 as well. Tier 2 is characterized by, supports for students with low to moderate level of need. So, for example, that could mean, students who are struggling with social skills. So offering something like, Lunch Bunch, which is a lunchtime-based program

Where a professional counselor might lead a group session for students who are struggling with social skills, just to make sure that they're building those additional social skills. Or students who are not really good at managing stress.

who are not very good at regulating behaviors. They might just need additional supports of building those additional skills beyond what is offered in Tier 1. This could happen in the classroom. A teacher might support,

or an aide might support some students, in the classroom itself. You might have a calming corner, for example, in elementary school to help students self-regulate. That's... those are kind of Tier 2 classroom-based supports, or you can have them as outside, classroom time, like the lunchbox that I described.

And then lastly, we have Tier 3, and these are for students with high needs around mental and behavioral health, including those who might have a mental health diagnosis. For example, being diagnosed with depression or anxiety. This can include,

mental health counseling, both inside schools, so if a mental health counselor in school provides direct services to students. It could also be, school referring students to outside mental health.

supports as well, behavioral supports as well. It can also include, systems of wraparound supports for the family as well, if there's an acute issue, for example, with, trauma in the family, and you really need to support not only the child, but the family as well. So that's that really intense, support for children with really high needs.

At Tier 3.

Now, MTSS is much more than just about the three tiers and all the different supports that are organized around those three tiers. Those three tiers are buckets of supports, but an important

part of MTSS is making sure that there's a way to identify students who are struggling, match them with the right supports, and then monitor progress, so you're constantly making sure that they're getting enough supports, increasing supports if they need more.

Decreasing supports if they're actually doing well and might need less supports as possible.

I think of this circle, which is kind of the middle of MTSS, as being the engine of MTSS, if you think of MTSS being a car, or to use another analogy, the heart of the human body that really stands... makes sure kids are getting what they need.

And this is a different way of thinking about the same idea of identifying, matching and monitoring students. Usually that starts with a referral process, that could be a teacher making a referral, could be a parent refer... saying, my child is struggling, I want someone to check what to see what's going on.

in, upper grades, it can even be self-referral, a way for students to say, I'm really struggling, I need some help.

Once that referral initially, comes in, and obviously as a district and as a school, you want to make sure there's a process, a very organized process, for referrals to come in, whether it's a form or, you know, the QR code or something that, allows,

these referrals to be concentrated. That is followed by additional data, so understanding what is going on. It could be a counselor interviewing the child, or screening the child, based on the data that comes in, developing a plan for how we're going to support this child. Do they need Tier 2 supports? Do they need

Tier 2 and or Tier 3 supports. It's important at that point to also communicate with parents and teachers to the extent that is possible, based on the unique situations.

So that everyone is aware of what is the plan for that particular child. And then, as I mentioned before, you want to monitor progress, reassess, and adjust the plan as needed.

And that's an important part of the whole MTSS system.

There's also a few, what we call, drivers of effectiveness, just from looking at research of what kinds of MTSS... what are the elements that make MTSS mostly effective? We identified three.

One is really important to have an important, to have a clear vision and commitment from leadership. That's at the district level, the superintendent and the administration of the district, and also the school level, the principal and administration of the school.

To make sure that there's a commitment to supporting mental health and behavioral health that is made clear by the leadership.

to articulate the MTSS vision clearly, and also to create the resources, to invest the resources and create the structures and space for MTSS to really work. Again, MTSS being a system approach that everyone needs to be involved, and therefore, you need... it's important to have that clear vision at the leadership,

Level. Second, effective implementation. Obviously, this is one of those things that anyone involved in education, or public health for that matter, knows.

that when you select evidence-based programs or interventions, they need to be implemented effectively. It's important that there's implementation fidelity, that there's monitoring of implementation of anything that you do across all three tiers.

So at Tier 1, we have a program, a curriculum. How do we make sure that we're implementing it? And, you know, social-emotional learning program, for example. How do we make sure we're implementing it, correctly, with fidelity? But also, if we're, indicating that a child needs to see a counselor twice a week, how do we make sure those sessions are happening? So across the entire, all three tiers, you need effective

And that those programs and interventions are aligned with priorities and vision and, and, fit with local context.

And lastly, staff competency. Not all staff in the building all need the same skills for MTSS.

Because as a system, each person plays a different role. What the general ed classroom teacher needs to do to make sure MTSS is working is different from what the mental health counselor needs to do, but they all have a role to play. Again, to use the analogy of the car, there's different parts to the car, but they all need to work together. And so it's important that everyone understands what is the MTSS approach, what is my role in the MTSS approach.

why it's important to have the buy-in, why should I, as a math teacher, or as the football coach, or as the librarian, why do I need to understand and play, and what role do I play within an MTSS approach to mental and behavioral health?

And lastly, it's really important that we also think about how data fits into MTSS. If the circle I mentioned before is the engine of the car, data is the gasoline, the gas that goes through,

that engine, and to the rest of the body, because we really want to make sure everything that we're doing is data-informed. That's starting with, what do our students need?

Both collectively as a population, but also what do individual students need? So, for example, what are the Tier 1 programs we need through a youth health survey, or universal screening tools? Also data around, are we implementing programs effectively? Are they being implemented, and are they working?

And also understanding what's the impact, so that we're using data across every single decision in FTSS.

So that's my MTSS presentation, which we'll now take into more in-depth, and for that, I think I'm passing things over to Sherry.

Alexis Kaigler: Thanks so much, and while Sherry's getting her slides set up, just want to remind people, you can put, your questions in the chat and, in the Q&A section, and I see several of you have already done that, so we'll now hear from Sherry. Thank you.

Shari Kessel Schneider, EDC: Hello, everyone. I'm so happy to be able to talk to you today about digital wellness and how the multi-tiered systems of support framework that you just heard about can help support students with different needs when it comes to their digital media use and its consequences.

So you've probably all seen the news, not only about the teen mental health crisis, but also about it being linked with the rise in social media use among youth.

Which happened at the same time. And we'll talk about the connections between those two in just a second. But you've also probably also heard about the rapid rise in school cell phone bans. Maybe some of you are implementing those now, and that certainly is a concrete step that schools can take to limit distractions during class time. But is it really enough to stem the potential negative effects of digital media use.

So, given all of these headlines, I just wanted to take a step back and look at some of the data. From 20...

13 to 2023, and this is data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey. You can see that there has been a rise in mental health problems, both among girls as well as boys. Here you can see depressive symptoms in the past 12 months, increasing from 39% to 53% among girls, 21 to 28% among boys.

And you can also see that there is a little bit of a widening of the difference between boys and girls over time as well, particularly around 2021.

At the same time, we also see a doubling of the proportion of youth who say that they are online almost constantly, with 46%, almost half.

saying this in 2022 and 2023. So it's really easy when you see this data to make the jump, that, digital media use is associated, or the cause of mental health challenges, particularly among girls.

And there is some evidence to support that link, but, there really is a lot more to that story.

So when we ask students about their digital media use, we find that their experiences are quite varied. On the positive side, many students do report benefits. They report, being able to connect with other teens online, to express themselves, to be creative.

To get emotional support, and also, they're able to seek help online sometimes for, for concerns that they might have around their health, mental health, etc. But at the same time, we also see

that students are experiencing, negative consequences of being online. They might be feeling mental health problems like anxiety and depression or sleep.

Poor academic performance. They may be involved in cyberbullying, and they may be, engaging in negative social comparison, comparing themselves to what they see online, that could lead to things like poor body image or disordered eating.

So given these mixed experiences, we really need to do more research to fully understand the nuanced relationship between digital media and mental health. The research findings are mixed for a number of reasons.

First, how is social media use being measured? Most... many studies so far have focused on time spent on social media. And while that is certainly important.

And it's easy to measure. You can ask for self-report, but you can also monitor, you know, reports on students' cell phones, let's say, of their screen time. But at the same time, quality of interactions is harder to measure, and that's really important as well. Are students... how are students using their time? Are they connecting with others? Are they exploring a new hobby? Or are they being exposed to content that might be harmful to them, that might harm their self-concept?

Or make them feel excluded or lonely.

So, so that's really important to think about both the quality as well as the time. In addition, some studies focus on problematic use of digital media, but they don't necessarily, study the everyday patterns of use that characterize, most teens.

Second, the existing research is somewhat limited in terms of the population studied, and we know that some youth are more susceptible to having negative online experiences due to pre-existing, you know, mental health conditions.

personality, etc. And there is some evidence that students with higher levels of existing mental health problems are more likely to also report problematic or addictive

digital media use. But this association is not true for everybody.

Lastly, we don't yet have a lot of data, from prospective studies that look at digital media use and mental health. Most of the data is cross-sectional, although that is certainly changing. But we really don't know, is it digital media use that's causing mental health problems? Is mental... are mental health problems, or kids with mental health problems, more likely to be drawn to using digital media or to be using it

in, negative ways. There's really so many different contributing factors to mental health, as you know, and as you heard about in Shai's presentation. So it's really difficult to be able to make some definitive inclusions right now. So I wanted to just mention, those things, and as you can

see from this, this headline, everyone says social media is bad for teens, but proving it is another thing.

So in light of the information that you've just heard, about digital media use and mental health, I want to flip things a little bit and instead, turn to focusing on digital wellness. And so I want to ask you, what comes to mind when you think of digital wellness?

To be honest, when you ask this question to most people, they think about trying to just prevent the negative consequences of digital media use, which of course we all want to do.

And our work with schools has shown that that's where many schools are as well. They really want to keep kids from being exposed to harmful content, they want to prevent cyberbullying, they want to prevent, high levels of use of digital media that might influence, or impact negatively students' concentration, their peer relationships, etc. And all of these are important.

But, what I want to do here is just encourage you to think more about digital wellness, that in order to prevent some of the negative consequences of digital media use, we need to better equip students to use digital media in positive ways that support their well-being.

And so here, you can see a definition of digital wellness. This is from Children's Hospital, Boston Digital Wellness Lab. And I really like this definition because it refers to wellness, both in terms of mental, physical, and social-emotional health. And I also like it because it focuses not just on limiting use, but also on intentional, authentic, and balanced engagement with technology and inter...

active media. And you know, we know that cell phones and social media, gaming, etc, those are not going to go away. So what we really want to focus on is how we can teach kids to use them in ways that support their mental and physical and emotional health. How can we teach them to self-manage their use?

Of digital media, to empower them to take control, and to take the actions, that they need to if they feel like digital media use might be having some harmful effects for them.

So now, we are circling back to the multi-tiered systems of support framework. And so, as you all know, whether or not cell phones are banned in schools.

Students are bringing their online experiences with them into the school building. They might be tired from being on their phones late at night. They may be upset at something that they saw online. They might think it was anxious, or it might be making them anxious or scared. They might be, anticipating a negative social interaction at school as a result of something that happened online, the night before.

And they simply just may be unable to focus on what they need to do, which is their learning.

So here we're going to apply the MTSS model to digital wellness. Work that we've done in schools, talking to students, faculty, and parents have led us to think about digital wellness in this context for several reasons.

First, it's critical to address varying levels of need of students and provide appropriate supports for all students when it comes to their digital media use. We know that some students, naturally, are able to set limits better than others, and so it's really important to consider those varying levels of needs, abilities, and the context in which each student grows up.

We also know that, given the ubiquitous nature of digital media use, promoting digital wellness is going to also require a systemic and integrated approach.

As you just heard, using data to drive approaches is really important, and MTSS is a data-driven approach.

It also provides a framework for identifying gaps and prioritizing strategies, so that you can think about how to best serve all students' needs.

And lastly, there's evidence of the effectiveness of the NTSS approach in many other areas, and so, it does not seem like a stretch to think about digital wellness in that area as well, particularly in how it relates to behavioral health.

So what does it look like when you apply MTSS, to digital wellness? Many schools are, focused here right now in Tier 1, digital wellness programs, practices, and policies for all learners.

And these are a list of some of the different elements of Tier 1 strategies when it comes to digital wellness.

With regard to classroom educational efforts, we are thinking about developmentally appropriate K-12 education, that's integrated, not just in health and technology classes, but that digital wellness is also, something that can be integrated in other subjects as well.

Next, school-wide educational efforts are also very important. Classroom education is actually a subset of that, and, you know, this can include special events, digital wellness week, speakers, those types of things, and so those can be great as a supplement to what kids are learning in the classroom.

School climate initiatives are certainly important. We know that for kids, their online and offline worlds are often, quite blurred, and so how do you address, for example, cyberbullying and its impacts on the school climate, even if it's not happening in the school building?

How do you show kindness and empathy in person? And what does kindness and empathy look like, when you are looking at them online?

And also, can you, can your school find ways to provide more screen-free activities to encourage youth to engage with each other without their phones?

The next is school policies, as we talked about with school cell phone policies, that can be one way to remove distractions, and that can be a very important element for a lot of schools. There has been, you know, some promising information about school policies in terms of both

Supporting classroom learning, as well as encouraging more social interactions at school, so that not everybody is on their phones during lunch or as they're passing in the hallways.

Training is really important. What we've learned is many teachers feel ill-equipped to teach about digital wellness. They feel like they can't keep up with technology, and students are telling us that their teachers, and other faculty really don't get how kids interact with each other online.

And so it's really important to make sure that staff feel confident and have the training that they need to be able to address these issues, both classroom teachers as well as counselors, who are certainly, going to encounter issues related to digital wellness, as they're doing counseling.

The role of parent engagement and parent...

parents and caregivers is really important. We know that schools are asking for help from parents. They want kids to show up to school, well-rested and ready to learn and not anxious from what they've seen online the night before. And parents are really exhausted from setting rules and fighting over cell phone limits.

And so both schools and parents have expressed needs to really try to work better together, to be on the same page, and to be able to reinforce efforts, so being able to engage parents in this issue is really important.

And lastly, school-community collaborations. What is the role of the community here? Well, there are so many other sectors that can play a role in digital wellness, and collaborating with the schools on that, can be really important. We're talking about community health departments, after-school programs, pediatricians, mental health providers.

faith-based communities, etc. There's a lot that schools and community organizations can work... do to work together. For example, a community organization might be able to help plan a community-wide, you know, digital media event week.

Or they might be able to provide more opportunities outside of the school for kids to engage in, activities without their phones to be able to volunteer and contribute to their communities.

So, targeted Tier 2 supports are needed for some youth who

who face greater mental health challenges and or who may need, you know, additional supports related to their social or communication skills. And a lot of times, these programs might already be in place, and so it's not a big lift, but just a matter of incorporating something related to digital wellness into those programs.

So, for example, Shai mentioned the Lunch Bunch group in his presentation, for students who need a little bit of extra support in their social or communication skills.

And so one thing that you could do is, with that lunch bunch group, you could include, addressing not only in-person interactions, but also online interactions. Talking about and providing opportunities to practice some of the online interaction skills that students need. You know, particularly, as you're thinking about interacting without the same social cues and contexts that people have when they're in person.

Like, digital, digital, interaction skills can be, practiced in that kind of a setting.

In addition, if you have a group for students who might be struggling with stress or anxiety, you could devote some time to exploring the world of digital media use and talking more with these kids about how they can self-manage their youth.

Excuse me, their use, so that they can be using digital media in supportive ways.

Peer support through education and mentoring can also be important for these youth, particularly, as we know that students really prefer to talk to their peers who understand, more of the nuances in terms of how kids are interacting with each other online.

And so lastly, we have one-on-one intensive interventions for youth that do require intensive support. So these may be youth that exhibit problematic or addictive digital media use.

Those who might be involved in cyberbullying, either those who are bullied or those who are bullying others, and sometimes students do play dual roles, and also those who may have mental health problems that may be exacerbated by what they see or who they interact with online.

So one of the things that we've heard a lot from students is that counselors don't necessarily proactively ask them about their digital media use unless, the specific reason for them to be talking is something like cyberbullying that's directly related to that use.

But oftentimes, when students come with mental health challenges, they don't necessarily explore the role of digital media use. And so that is something that, that counselors can be encouraged to do more of, can be trained a little bit more in terms of.

How to integrate that. And of course, you know, critical to providing one-on-one support if there, is referral to community resources for more intensive supports, especially if it's something beyond the scope of the school counseling staff, or it requires specific.

A specific time of inter... kind of intervention, such as with, problematic or problematic interactive media use.

So how do you get started in thinking about digital wellness in a more systemic, multi-tiered approach? So the first thing that I often suggest is to establish a digital wellness task force, or to charge an existing group, to take on the topic of digital wellness.

that way, you have a group that can listen to all voices, parents' voices, students' voices, teachers' and faculty's voices.

To get buy-in for the efforts. They can work to, educate the community about any substantial programmatic or policy changes that might be, made, to help them really understand why those changes are being made so that there's buy-in and support.

And everybody understands that, the decisions were made with the input from multiple voices.

Second, it's important to conduct an inventory and assessment of existing digital wellness efforts. You may find out that there are particular groups of students whose needs aren't being met, or that you're lacking supports at a particular tier.

And lastly, think further about how you might start to think about students' levels of needs, and ways that you may match them with the appropriate supports.

So, I'll just conclude here. These are just a few steps to get started. It might seem like a lot, but really, as I said before, you can take a lot of your existing programs and integrate digital wellness into those, and that's one way to get an early start in bolstering the supports that your school provides.

And I think by taking these initial steps to embed digital wellness into MTSS, it can become a framework that equips schools to help students thrive, both offline and online, and support their learning as well as their health.

So thank you all very much.

Alexis Kaigler: Thank you so much for all that great information, and I just love that concept of us really thinking about digital wellness. So now I'm going to hand it over to our final speaker, and then we have plenty of time for Q&A, so keep the questions in the question and answer box so that we can get to those at the end. So I'll hand it over to Richard to close us out.

Richard Fournier_EDC: Great, thank you. Hey, everyone!

And good afternoon. Unfortunately, my colleague Shauna is unable to be here, but she may be able to join toward the end of the webinar for the Q&A.

So, I want to talk to everyone today about an approach that we think is very effective for districts and schools in preventing suicide in youth. We call this approach the multi-tiered Suicide Prevention for Schools. Building on the presentation that Shai and Sherry both provided on MTSS,

We have also applied this framework to prevention efforts for suicide and positive mental health throughout the tiers.

This is increasingly important, because as we have generally seen, as you probably know, we have generally seen rising rates of deaths by suicide and suicide attempts by youth throughout the U.S. over the last decade plus.

So, to start, what is effective... what is effective school-based suicide prevention? Many of you have probably have, or had some level of familiarity with this, or experience around

suicide prevention trainings, educating you, for example, on the warning signs of... warning signs of suicide. We see effective school-based suicide prevention as going beyond these trainings alone, and looking at how we can really implement a variety of prevention strategies that exist throughout and across different tiers in your schools.

This approach supports schools in taking a system-wide approach in the prevention of student suicide.

This means focusing on practice, policy, and staff development that provides consistent approaches and common language across the district.

So, take a second to look through these six component areas. We believe that this whole approach is most effective when these strategies that I refer to are anchored around these six areas.

And we know from research that while suicide cannot be stopped, suicide is preventable. We know that school systems and protocols can guide the school community in responding to suicide risk and deaths by suicide.

We know from research that all school community members can learn the warning signs of suicide and take actions to support at-risk youth. We know that implementing a variety of prevention has been shown to reduce youth suicide rates.

We also know that schools can invest in the social-emotional well-being of youth and create environments which reduce risk factors and increase protective factors.

So, in looking at this slide, effective prevention then entails implementing a broad, system-wide approach

And that includes these areas. Investing in the development of policies and protocols to support students at risk, right?

This might be a district-wide suicide prevention policy that folks put together and probably approved by a board. Developing community partners. Many districts are surrounded by at least one or two health organizations, for example, that can provide support and trainings.

Trainings for school staff on suicide prevention.

Investment in protective factors, or the creation of a school culture and environment that supports youth well-being.

something that can be partially addressed through social-emotional learning work, as Shai was noting earlier.

And the development of stakeholder buy-in from both the school and, of course, the larger community for suicide prevention efforts.

So, if you look on the left of this slide, you'll find all the key components that I just mentioned.

And on the right, of course, are the multi... the MTSS structure with the tiers.

At the very base, at the bottom here of our framework, you'll find the foundation of engaging key stakeholders for all that we do, right? This is very critical, because it's not just students and staff and the leaders, but also families, everyone that's involved, from someone who's driving a bus, to a custodian, to the community members that have anything to do with the school.

Or with youth within the school.

So from there, we want to promote protective factors in students' lives through SEL, mental health promotion, etc. And this, we do for all the students in the school, which is at Tier 1.

Around Tier 2, we want to identify and support youth who are at risk of suicide, and often this identification of youth occurs through small group trainings and screenings of students, which, again, is generally around that Tier 2 area.

We want to implement our suicide risk response and post-invention protocols when a youth exhibits those warning signs of suicide or death by... or if a death by suicide occurs.

requiring us to provide intensive individual interventions to youth who are struggling with suicide, or the loss of a peer or a family member to suicide, right? And that's going to happen at that Tier 3 level.

And we have community partnerships over here on the side, on the far left there, as they can provide experts, behavioral health providers.

And advocates who can support our school efforts across all three tiers.

I do want to acknowledge here that this is a bit of a simplistic view of the key components that I mentioned, and that actions across many of these components may actually occur across more than just Tier 1

or just one tier, right? They could be overlapping in many cases. For example, just having a suicide risk response policy and protocol in place could be seen as a Tier 1 intervention, as it is a

resource for the whole school. But we could identify the implementation of that policy as existing at the Tier 3 level.

Likewise, you might conduct a training for a small group of school staff on how to identify youth who are at risk for suicide, but then provide support in an intensive manner at the, to the individual youth who are found to be at risk, right? That would be more at the Tier 3.

So, I won't spend too much... we're short on time anyway, I'm not going to spend too much time on this slide, but generally, these are what we hope districts and schools can end up with when they engage in suicide prevention around MTSS, right? We'll want to be able to do a number of these things. We want to have a plan and a vision. We want to be able to equip folks with skills and the capacity to prevent youth suicide across the tiers, increase connectedness with other districts and schools etc. And you'll be getting these slides as well. These will be posted, so you'll be able to look more closely at each of these.

So, I just want to look over quickly the process that we usually engage in, and we recommend for districts doing this work on their own.

usually includes 3 main phases, right? And generally, we try to scope this over 2 to 3 years. So we begin with the environmental assessment, right, on the left side here, for the start of the school year. And by the way, this environmental assessment is a free assessment that we've created at EDC.

any district or school is welcome to use. I'll place a link in the chat at the end of this presentation so you have it available and you can download it. And I'll talk a little bit about this later if I have time, but this is basically an assessment that's used with the school team to look at everything going on in relation to suicide prevention, from Tier 1 to Tier 3.

It asks questions like, what do we have in place from grades K-12 in SEL related to prevention, such as stress management? And do we have protocols for teachers in place when students are showing potential signs?

And also, who knows about these protocols? Are they accessible? Are they up-to-date? You know, these types of things. That data that we gather from the assessment can then be used to inform an action plan.

And by looking at that data, schools and districts can spotlight strengths, but also highlight areas for improvement to construct a multi-year plan for implementation. This plan might include, for example, developing new protocols, directions for making them known and accessible, trainings for staff, improvements on Tier 1 prevention programs.

Parent nights to create more awareness around mental health for students, etc.

The idea for the second year, the second part of the process, is to start to implement on this plan, right? And then think about how we can make it sustainable. But we all know that there's high,

often high turnover in districts, whether it's the superintendent or central office folks, teachers, counselors, and other staff, so it's important

But these policies and protocols and the other efforts that we create can last beyond personnel changes. So if you have, for example, annual events in place to provide staff with short trainings around the protocols and where they're accessible, you'd want that to occur every year so we can help alleviate gaps that sometimes happen with that staff turnover.

Okay, I won't spend too much time on this slide, but I just wanted to, show it at, again, more granular level what we typically recommend for team structure on this. So the bubble to the, the circle to the far left is what I'm sort of focusing on, for,

Given our time right now. First, we recommend putting together a team or a task force that's very diverse in roles and responsibilities. So you don't only want clinicians or folks that have suicide prevention backgrounds, you want to include also central office leaders, building leaders, teachers, and sometimes even students or family members.

Basically, you want to be able to have stakeholders on the team that do not have all that background. This is because in the data gathering and planning phases, we want all perspectives to be heard and valued, and it will add a lot of weight to the data that you're collecting.

For districts working with us, but district teams could do this on their own as well. We hold a variety of events together, which make up a community of practice, either for a single district, or with a set of schools, or a cohort of districts, to basically go through each of those six components throughout the year.

And in these events, schools and districts can, spotlight, again, their successes, their challenges, lessons learned, etc.

I just have a few minutes left, but I want to dive in just a little bit around the environmental assessment, because I think you'll find this super useful, and again, I'll put the link in the chat towards the end.

Our goal with this assessment was to be a foundation for all the work that comes in that process that we looked at a few slides ago, right? So, in your planning efforts, your sustainability planning, the actual implementation, the environmental assessment serves as a foundation. It'll help your school to uncover information on context.

Resources and evidence-based practices that can inform

Your own assessment of what is needed.

It can help your school team identify, again, the strengths and areas that you want to celebrate and build on, as well as areas for growth. Because we know that most schools and districts are already doing something related to suicide prevention and those mental health promotion efforts, so support and acknowledge what is already going on.

And the idea is that this assessment is done by the team, not by one individual. We've worked with a lot of districts, for example, where one person, like a suicide prevention coordinator, literally, or maybe a lead counselor, felt that they had a lot of things in place.

But then when they got the team together and everyone was looking at the assessment, they realized in the end that actually, no, maybe we did have some protocols in place, but no one knew about them, and no one knew how to access them. And on top of that, maybe they were a little out of date. So it's really important to have all that variety of,

of voices in there as well. And these aren't surveys, these are essentially... it's almost like an inventory check, but there's... it goes... it gets pretty detailed.

So, just real briefly, when you open the assessment, you'll see five...

stages of change to provide rankings, and that'll guide the majority of your assessment process, right? In the assessment tool, there's a scale that will ask you to mark what stage of change you are within each of the assessment items.

And these stages of change that you can mark correspond directly with the stages of change theory, and you can see them here on this table. So this would go all the way from Tier 1 to Tier 3, and all the different prevention efforts that are in place.

Let's just give you a little quick image. When I send the link, keep an eye out for the assessment companion guide. It's a little lengthy, but you can... you can scroll to any section you want, and it'll help guide you through the tool if you're... if you're thinking of using it, within your... within your districts there.

Yeah, next one, please. Okay, just to mention that we are currently working with MTSP in 19 districts in Indiana, 5 in Connecticut, 8 in Massachusetts that are kicking off this year, and 3 in South Carolina. So we're already starting to collect a lot of data that will help continue to inform and make iterations on the environmental assessment. So it's being... that assessment and other tools that we have are being informed by data we're collecting from working in all these, different areas here, which we're very excited about. And then the next couple of slides, and then I'll wrap this up, I'm not going to go through these, but when you get the slides, when they're posted, you may want to check these out, because the environmental assessment you can also use as a pre and post. So for your own district, if you decide to use it.

Obviously, in 2 or 3 years, you can take it again, and then look at your progress that you've made. And these next three slides are just examples from 10 districts, so you can kind of see, what it looked like.

And then the last slide here is just some quotes from some districts that really enjoyed the work.

And that's it, so I'll wrap it up there, and just want to thank everyone very much.

And, please, again, just a reminder, please enter into the chat any questions that you have. Thank you.

Alexis Kaigler: Thanks so much, Richard. We appreciate that extensive information. I think one thing that you saw through all of the presenters is how important to have a data-driven approach. So, I am going... we don't have much time, but I'm going to try to get through all the questions that we have in our Q&A section.

Shai, I'm gonna start with you, and this is a two-part question, so I'll read the first part, and then I'll read the second part after you've answered that. Can you go back to when you were talking about the multi-tiered approach? One of the things that you talked about is screening.

And so, if you can kind of tell everybody, what does the initial screening look like? How is it administered? What age do you begin?

Shai Fuxman: Yeah, that's a great question. So there's actually quite a few mental health screening tools out there. In fact, one of the things I'll do in just a second is put a link to the National Center for School Mental Health. They have a library of assessments and screeners.

In terms of when to start, that's a great question. There are, there are screeners designed for young children.

where parents and or teachers do observations, so it's not... you're not asking children about the, you know, their SAD. And then most of them are actually for, adolescents, so middle school and high school.

There's a process for how to implement a screener. You really want to be thoughtful about how you do it. The last thing you want to do is screen students, and then realize that you don't have

any follow-up, you don't have the resources to follow up. So you really want to think about the whole process.

Usually screeners are very brief sets of questions. One, for example, is PHQ-9, which is a 9-item, screener for depression.

A professional asks those questions of students individually, usually twice a year, you know, obviously a private setting, and based on that, students are either screened in or screened out from

In that case, depression. There's also some for anxiety and other mental health conditions.

The important thing to remember about mental health... universal mental health screening tools is that they're not diagnostic, so you're not diagnosing students with, depression, you're just flagging them as being at risk for depression, as an example, or other conditions, and then you do it, you know, if someone is flagged in, then you do follow-up, supports and, both assessments and supports.

Alexis Kaigler: Great, thanks. And then the second part is, I wonder, could you spend just a... just a quick second talking a little bit about bullying? I don't know if there's a screening for that, and would those students also be referred to services, the ones, particularly the ones that are doing the bullying?

Shai Fuxman: Yeah, that's a great question. We know that oftentimes, not always, but students who are involved in bullying, the bullying itself is a manifestation of mental behavioral health, underlying mental behavioral health challenges.

So, if a student is caught bullying, the first thing, obviously, you want to do is make sure the victims are safe. But you do want to work with that child, the person who's doing the bullying, to see what is going on, to try to figure out the root of the behaviors.

and obviously provide the supports. I should also say that while we think about bullying, the classic idea of bullying as one-on-one, you know, the bully, sometimes bullying happens in groups, and sometimes it could be a manifestation of a school climate, a negative school climate. So we also want to be thinking about bullying as a Tier 1, bullying prevention as a Tier 1 approach as well.

To make sure all students know how to develop meaningful relationships in a way that is a protective factor against bullying. But to your... to the original question, yes, if a student is caught bullying, you definitely want to consider what might be underlying conditions.

Alexis Kaigler: Okay, great.

So I'm gonna refer this next question to Richard. So I know your... your presentation focused on schools, but is there a similar tiered system for statewide suicide prevention that's not just within the school system?

Richard Fournier_EDC: I... honestly, I don't know the answer to that. There may be, so Shai and, Sherry, I'm not sure if either of you know. I'm not quite... I'm not... I'm actually not sure.

I wouldn't be surprised if there were some states that have adapted or been thinking... I... lots of people are aware of MTSS, it's actually growing nationally, so I wouldn't be surprised if states are thinking about that in terms of integrating it with their other work. But I apologize, I'm not sure yes or... I don't have a yes or no answer.

That's a good idea.

Alexis Kaigler: Do any of our other presenters want to jump in?

Shai Fuxman: I don't know specifically about suicide prevention, but definitely a lot of state education agencies have adopted MTSS as a framework that they, support districts with, be it through funding, through grants, through, technical assistance.

your guidance documents, and the concept of MTSS is meant to be both academic and non-academic, so within that context, there might be supports around suicide prevention within MTSS as well.

Alexis Kaigler: Okay, great, thanks.

And our final, question I want to ask, Sherry to address. So, I know you talked about digital wellness.

Shari Kessel Schneider, EDC: And I was wondering,

Alexis Kaigler: Can you talk about how do we instill empathy and kindness into students who are bullies to others? Both, I know you talked about there's not always, like, clear boundaries between the online and the offline space, so maybe you can share examples about instilling empathy, both that kids can do on the online space, but maybe the offline space as well.

Shari Kessel Schneider, EDC: Yeah, thank you for that question. I think that it's, and I welcome Shai and Richard to jump in as well, with their expertise, but I think that, it's really important to think about what things look like. You know, what does kindness look like online? What does it look like offline? What is the difference? How can you be empathetic in an online situation where there is a lack of social cues and context? I think often with kids, sometimes they may.

make a comment online, and they have a certain intention in mind, and it's not taken the same way by the person who sees the comment. They might not mean it to be harmful, but it may, in fact, be perceived as harmful. And so, I think in terms of online and offline communications, it's really important for, I think schools to.

talk with students about what the differences are, how things might be interpreted differently, and what does empathy look like online versus offline? You know, what does it look like when you're talking to someone face-to-face? If you can't see them face-to-face and you're not quite sure, you know, what they mean by a certain comment, how can you ask questions?

Or, explore further their situation so that you can, show empathy online.

So, I think those things are really important to kind of think about it both ways.

Alexis Kaigler: Thank you so much. So I want to thank all of our presenters today. I hope everyone found this valuable. I want to thank everybody joining us today, and I would ask everybody if you would just take a second to fill out our evaluation. It's on the screen, it's also been put on the chat, and thanks again for joining. Please sign up for future webinars.

By the Children's Safety Network. Thanks, everybody, for joining today.