



Universal Mental Health Screening

Public Act 104-0032

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **When must schools begin offering mental health screenings to students?**
 - Screenings must be offered beginning with the 2027-28 school year.
 - However, the requirement is only in effect if the state has successfully procured a screening tool that offers a self-report option for students and is made available to school districts at no cost.
2. **Is there funding to support the implementation of universal mental health screening?**
 - As noted in question 1, the requirement to offer mental health screenings is only in effect for the 2027-28 school year and after if the state has successfully procured a screening tool that offers a self-report option for students and is made available to school districts at no cost.
3. **Will districts have a choice over the specific screening instrument they utilize?**
 - Yes, school districts will have a choice.
 - School districts may use the screener provided for free by the state or select their own, provided it meets the requirements for a universal mental health screener as outlined on page 48 of the [School Screening Readiness Report](#).
4. **Does a screener have to be “approved” by ISBE to be utilized in lieu of the state-procured option?**
 - No, there is no state “approval” process for alternative screeners.
 - While ISBE will provide a list of screeners that meet the qualifying criteria for use in schools as outlined on page 48 of the [School Screening Readiness Report](#), districts can select any tool they want, provided it meets those same criteria.
5. **Does the screener diagnose mental health disorders in students?**
 - No, a mental health screener is not intended to diagnose mental health conditions. Only mental health or medical professionals (as determined by each state’s licensing laws) are qualified to make a diagnosis.
 - The goal of the mental health screener is to identify students with possible mental health problems and to provide the option for further assessment.
6. **What is the relationship between social emotional learning and mental health?**

- Mental health includes a person's emotional, cognitive, and psychological well-being. Social emotional learning (SEL) is a process through which people acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to understand and manage emotions. Thus, SEL promotes positive mental health.

7. Will the state-procured universal mental health screening tool include SEL questions as well as mental health?

- No, the universal mental health screener will focus on mental health rather than social-emotional learning.

8. How is behavioral health different from mental health?

- According to [The Baker Center for Children and Families](#), school-based behavioral health is a broad term referring to mental health, substance use, social emotional learning, and social determinants of health. For some school-based professionals, the terms “mental health” and “behavioral health” are interchangeable, referring to the complex intermingling of biological, psychological, and environmental factors that lead to a child’s emotional well-being.
- Others consider “mental health” and “behavioral health” to be overlapping but distinct, with “mental health” referring to psychological and emotional well-being, and “behavioral health” referring to a student’s physical, displayed behaviors.

9. Will the Social Emotional Learning Hubs help with this work in our schools?

- The SEL Hubs will continue to provide professional development and capacity-building support to districts and regional offices in their areas to establish and expand SEL and trauma-responsive programming.
- SEL Hubs strengthen the universal SEL and climate conditions necessary for mental health screening to be successful. While they do not conduct screenings or provide clinical tools, they can help ensure districts have the capacity, Tier 1 systems, and stakeholder readiness needed to implement screenings responsibly and effectively.

10. What grade levels must be offered mental health screenings?

- [Public Act 104-0032](#) requires districts to offer screenings to student in Grades 3-12. Districts may choose to offer screenings in Grades K-2 as well but are not required to do so.

11. Why isn’t there a screening requirement for students in Grades K-2?

- It is challenging for an early elementary school student to reliably complete a self-report screening tool. At these early grade levels, students are still developing literacy skills and the ability to understand abstract questions, which makes responses less accurate. As a result, including K-2 students would require significantly more staff involvement to administer the screener one-on-one or in small groups, creating substantial logistical and resource challenges for schools and districts.

12. How long will it take for a student to complete a screener?

- The [School Screening Readiness Report](#) includes "takes 10 minutes or less to administer" as a qualifying criterion for alternative screeners.

13. Can an SEL screener be used to fulfill the mental health screening requirement in Public Act 104-0032?

- No, SEL screeners do not meet the requirements of a universal mental health screener. Mental health screeners are broad, initial tools used to identify signs of mental health conditions.
- Social emotional learning screeners focus on assessing skills like self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making, and relationship skills. SEL screeners evaluate students' ability to manage their emotions and relationships. The goal of both is early intervention.

14. What behaviors must a screener address?

- A qualifying mental health screener addresses internalizing behavior, externalizing behavior, trauma, self-harm, harm to others, and ADHD and focus challenges. See page 48 of the [School Screening Readiness Report](#).

15. Will the data be used beyond the school? Is it submitted anywhere?

- The statute does not require schools to share universal mental health screening data with any entity outside of the school.

16. How many times per school year do districts have to administer a screening?

- At least once a year (beginning with the 2027-28 school year, only if the state has successfully procured a screening tool). Research shows that it is best practice to offer screenings two to three times per school year.

17. Why should schools screen for mental health conditions?

- Public school attendance is a legal requirement in Illinois for all children between the ages of 6 and 17, subject to those limited exceptions enumerated in 105 ILCS 5/26-1. Public schools are the ideal setting to identify mental health needs in children and youth early on, address access challenges, and ensure students and families receive high-quality, evidence-based care.
- Providing behavioral health supports in schools helps to address inequities in access to care since low-income students, students of color, and other historically underserved populations are more likely than other student populations to depend on schools for these resources. the behavioral health supports.

18. What is the purpose of universal mental health screening?

- According to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#), 50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14. It is [estimated](#) that one in five students will experience a significant mental health problem during their school years.
- Universal mental health screening, particularly when implemented within a multi-tiered model of behavioral support, allows for earlier identification and intervention for

potential mental health conditions and may prevent the need for more intensive special education or therapeutic services later.

19. What resources and guidance will ISBE provide to support implementation?

- Resource materials for schools to implement universal mental health screenings, including model policies and guidance, will be available by **September 1, 2026**.
- All materials that are currently available can be found on the [Mental and Behavioral Health webpage](#). Any additional announcements, guidance, or materials will be posted on the webpage linked above.