

# Frequently Asked Questions: Universal Mental Health Screening Readiness Tool



## 1. What is mental health?

Mental health relates to thoughts and feelings and how those may impact our lives. Diagnosable mental illnesses or mental disorders, such as depression, generalized anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder, also may comprise mental health issues. Mental health also encompasses wellness promotion; social, emotional, and behavioral health; and the ability to cope with life's challenges.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. What is behavioral health?

Behavioral health issues may include substance use disorders, eating disorders, or conduct problems. Behavioral health problems are often a reflection of an underlying mental health issue, so addressing behavioral health issues often requires attention to mental health.<sup>2</sup>

## 3. What is “universal mental health screening” in schools in Illinois?

“Universal mental health screening” refers to a school district offering a mental health screening to every student in every grade enrolled in the school district each year.<sup>3</sup>

## 4. What is a “universal mental health screening program”?

A school district that has established a program for universal mental health screening has embedded the practice of screening in each school's annual practice of supporting student wellness, growth, and achievement. A program is more than just selecting a tool and scheduling a day to administer it to students; it includes all levels of school personnel understanding their roles in the process of screening and being aware

of the purpose and goals of the screening and knowing what to do if a student needs immediate assistance. Often, a mental health screening program is embedded into a school's existing Multi-Tiered System of Support structure and overseen by a behavioral health team at the school. This team is usually responsible for (1) providing program oversight and advising on key decisions; and (2) promoting the program, its mission, and core strategies.

## 5. Is a mental health “screening” the same as a mental health “assessment”?

No. “Screening” and “assessment” are often used interchangeably; however, they are quite different. Screening is a preliminary evaluation that looks for possible signs of a problem that would require further evaluation and support. Screening tools are typically short in length, quick to administer and score, and do not result in a diagnosis. Assessment, on the other hand, is a lengthier, more detailed examination that systematically evaluates the type and nature of a problem in order to identify appropriate treatment.<sup>4</sup>

## 6. Will ISBE be providing more information about mental health screening tool selection?

Yes. Given the results and ensuing recommendations reported in the [2023 Landscape Scan on Mental Health Screening Practices in Illinois Schools](#), ISBE recognizes that there continues to be a mix of screening practices across the state. The agency has recommended that guidance about screening tool use and selection be released as part of a phased approach to implementing universal mental health screening. The results of the Readiness Tool will help ISBE plan for the development of this guidance.

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from [National Association of School Psychologists](#).

<sup>2</sup>Adapted from [National Association of Social Workers](#).

<sup>3</sup>Previously provided in the [2023 Landscape Scan on Mental Health Screening Practices in Illinois Schools](#).

<sup>4</sup>Adapted from [American Psychological Association](#).