Knowledge into Action
Action into Knowledge

School Mental Health Ontario | Santé mentale en milieu scolaire Ontario | Western | Centre for School Mental Health

Implementation Practices for Tier 1 Approaches

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Innovation and Scale Up Lab Overview

The Innovation and Scale Up Lab's (ISU Lab) mission is to examine and advance evidence-based and implementation-sensitive approaches within school mental health, and to mobilize both research and practice evidence to enhance quality, consistency, scalability, and sustainability in Ontario schools. To move this agenda forward, the ISU Lab aims to:

- Seek out promising research and practice examples

- Partner with key stakeholders to ensure that proposed innovations meet a clear and specific need

- Study innovations to ensure that promising approaches are evidence-based and implementation-sensitive within the context of Ontario

- Share lessons from promising approaches and engage in related knowledge mobilization and dissemination

Projects

These promising practices were drawn from the Tier 1 case studies of the ISU Lab, to date:

Tier One, Universal Mental Health Promotion
- Everyday Mental Health (EDMH)
- Faith and Wellness (F&W)
- Bell Let's Talk in the Classroom
- Skills4Life Career Studies SEL (S4L)

Purpose

The Aligned and Integrated Model (AIM) is a framework for School Mental Health and Well-being. It consists of fundamental elements for a healthy school, within the framework of a multi-tiered system of support. The AIM framework identifies ways for educators to support students at each tier of intervention. At the Tier 1 level educators can welcome, include, understand, promote, and partner to support the well-being of students. Tier 1 preventative and promotion efforts serve to foster the well-being and success of all students. Effective implementation of such programs is necessary to create positive, safe, and supportive school environments. The purpose of the following summary is to identify effective strategies across the Tier 1 projects involved in the SMHO Innovation and Scale Up Lab to identify pragmatic and usable practices to consider when implementing Tier 1 programs in the school setting.

Implementation Practices for Tier 1 Approaches

Establish Consistent and Collaborative Work Processes with Project Partners
It is imperative to build strong partnerships from the outset to support the successful uptake and implementation of the program. Work with partners to establish and define work processes. For example, develop a collaborative launch strategy, agree upon common messaging, and provide coordinated supports. Additionally, leverage partners' resources and knowledge to develop a synchronized approach that increases engagement and promotes successful implementation. In the Faith &Wellness (F&W) project, SMH-ON and Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA) developed a strong partnership from the outset and agreed on a joint launch strategy to ensure consistent and concurrent information about the resource was being shared.

"Coordinated supports offered locally (through Mental Health Leads and local presidents) and provincially (through OECTAs provincial office) avoided duplication of efforts and allowed for a streamlined approach where teachers were able to access the level of help they needed" – F&W Case Study (p.20)

Build Relationships with Teacher Unions and Federations

Prioritize developing strong relationships with key partners such as Teacher Federations and Principal Associations. These partners hold valuable knowledge about the education system and the needs of educators. Building intentional relationships with these key partners from the outset ensures that a resource is aligned with both the needs of educators and the curriculum. In the F&W project the OECTA facilitated the alignment and integration of the Faith component of the resource. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for ongoing learning between team members. Developing relationships with Teacher Federations facilitated working relationships between SMH-ON and educators. In the Every Day Mental Health (EDMH), F&W, and Skills 4 Life (S4L) projects, working with teachers' unions was imperative in establishing a relationship between SMH-ON and educators who were then able to engage in the iterative development and implementation process.

"Successful implementation of school-based interventions requires knowledge of the education system and related initiatives, understanding of the school environment and successful engagement of stakeholders, including credible and influential champions. In this project, the partnership with the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) allowed the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) to understand and plan for a wide range of context and delivery constraints" – S4L Case Study (p.19)

Provide Multiple Pathways for Learning

Offer a variety of training formats and materials to meet the learning needs of teachers. For example, provide training materials in multiple formats (e.g., online videos, print copy manuals, interactive e-books) to increase accessibility and optimize uptake and implementation. In the S4L project, teachers indicated that the format of the resource should be aligned with lesson planning materials, and that this alignment was especially important for teachers whose first language is not English. With respect to teacher preparation and delivery of programming, it is important to provide training opportunities that are a good fit for teachers involved in the training. Training opportunities should not take a one size fits all approach as learning needs can vary by context. However, providing the least intrusive training offerings and ongoing support is critical. Additionally, Communities of Practice can serve as a learning opportunity for Mental Health Leads and teachers implementing programs. Communities of practice allow for peer-to-peer learning through discussion and collaboration.

"Teachers need information about the resource in a variety of formats to accommodate different learning styles and to provide opportunities to interact with the resource" – S4L Case Study (p.19)

Allow for Flexible Implementation while Maintaining Program Consistency
Given the challenges associated with teaching a demanding curriculum, it is important to allow for some flexibility in program delivery to encourage teacher buy-in and successful uptake of the resource. Some teachers express concerns about being able to complete all lessons contained within a program. However, it is vital to balance flexibility while maintaining program integrity and consistency. For example, recognize that program delivery may vary by school and context and allow for some flexibility with timelines. Provide ongoing implementation support to MHL's and educators with the goal to increase implementation quality and fidelity over time. Doing so will ensure that program structure and consistency is not jeopardized while still allowing for flexibility when necessary.

"Many teachers enjoyed the Guide materials but would have liked to have more time to complete everything. Although the evaluation placed some constraints on the time to complete the Guide, such challenges are likely to persist due to curriculum related time challenges" – Bell Let's Talk in the Classroom (LTIC) Case Study (p.17)

Actively Involve Educators from the Outset and Incorporate their Feedback
Recognize the unique context of teachers who are implementing programs in the classroom and create space for teachers to be directly and actively involved in the co-development and implementation of a resource from the outset. In the EDMH project, educators attended resource planning sessions and contributed directly to the co-creation of the resource. They then field tested the resource and made further refinements based on their experience using the resource in the classroom. In the F&W, S4L and LTIC projects, feedback provided by teachers was incorporated into future iterations of the resource and was key in encouraging buy-in and promoting uptake among educators.

Additionally, be responsive to the lived experience of teachers and value their knowledge of the school environment. For example, acknowledge the limited time that teachers are able commit to projects above and beyond the curriculum, the implications of school-dependant operational details, and changes in workload throughout the school year. Incorporate their unique perspectives by making modifications to the resource or providing implementation supports as necessary. Engaging with teachers who have an invaluable understanding of delivery and school context ensures that a resource is implementation-sensitive from the outset.

"The co-development process relied on educators' pre-existing expertise and understanding about how to contextualize each practice to fit the needs of their students. Having a wide range of practices to choose from allows educators to optimize student learning by matching the practices with the learning needs of their students" – EDMH Case Study (p.13)

Research and Resources

- **Innovation and Scale Up Lab Case Studies**
  - Available at: https://www.csmh.uwo.ca/smho-lab/resources.html