



Evaluation of Nebraska Department of Education's Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems Initiative

Part 1: Mid-Year Summary Report
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Introduction

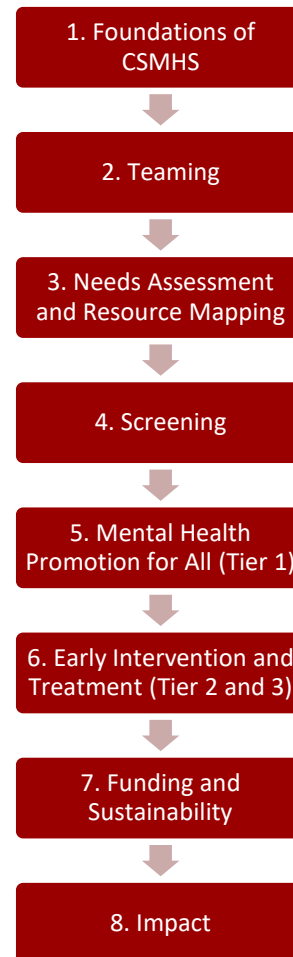
The University of Nebraska Public Policy Center (NUPPC), in partnership with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), is evaluating the state’s School Mental Health Initiative funded through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER III) funds directed to the State of Nebraska. The project supports the implementation of the evidence-based Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems (CSMHS) model¹ in 15 Regional organizations (Educational Services Units [ESUs] and Morningstar Counseling) and 57 school districts across the state.

The CSMHS model includes the implementation of eight domains within a school building, school district, or ESU (Figure 1). The implementation of CSMHS is typically implemented in conjunction with the School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation System² (SHAPE System). The goal of CSMHS is to build a “full array of supports and services that promote positive school climate, social emotional learning, mental health, and well-being, while reducing the prevalence and severity of mental illness”¹.

The CSMHS Initiative implemented by NDE worked with both regional organizations and school districts to match an interest in implementation of CSMHS with training, technical assistance, and funding. NDE first convened a training for personnel representing ESUs and school districts to lead others in CSMHS implementation. Then, partners provided Regional Institutes to school districts to assist in implementation. Beyond this training, NDE provided ongoing technical assistance to regional organizations and school districts to assist in implementation of CSMHS (Figure 2).

NUPPC is working with NDE and the participating partners to understand the implementation and impact of this project. This evaluation consists of 1) an assessment of the Statewide Institute for changes in knowledge, likelihood to implement, implementation needs, and satisfaction with the training; 2) an assessment of Regional Institutes to understand attendance, approach to training, changes in knowledge, likelihood to implement, implementation needs, and satisfaction with training; and 3) an evaluation of CSMHS implementation including characteristics of those schools and ESUs implementing

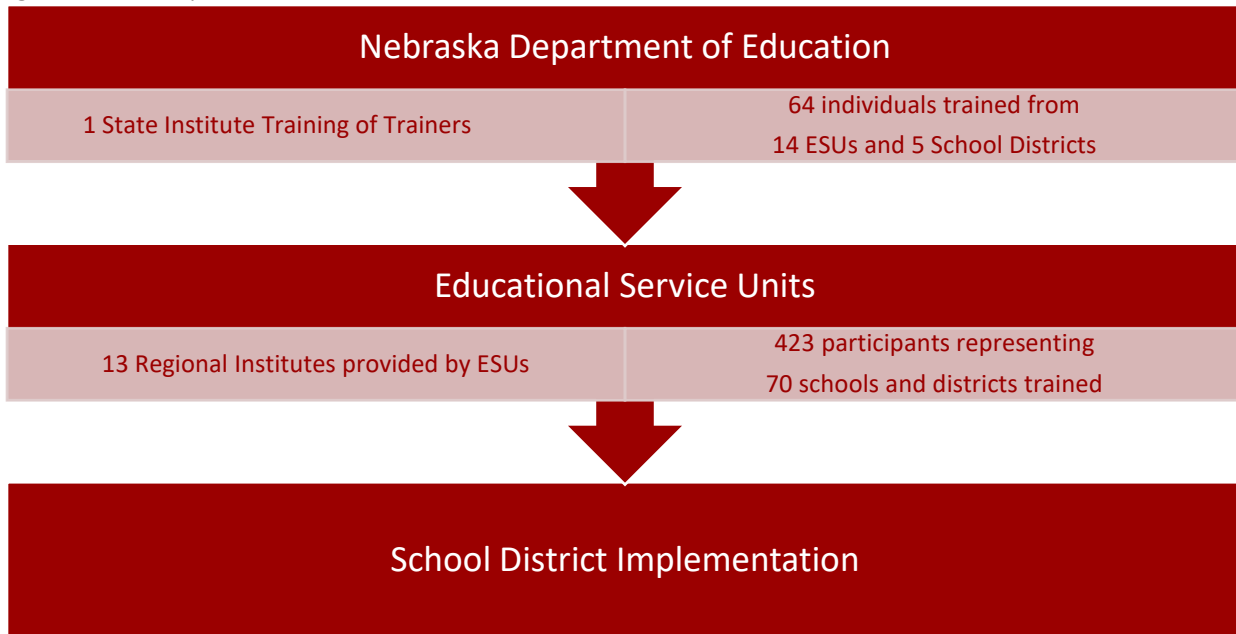
Figure 1. Comprehensive School Mental Health System Domains



¹ National Center for School Mental Health and MHTTC Network Coordinating Office. (2019). *Participant manual, National School Mental Health Best Practices: Implementation Guidance Modules for States, Districts, and Schools*. Palo Alto, CA: MHTTC Network Coordinating Office. Quote from p. 15.

² <https://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/SHAPE/>

Figure 2. CSMHS Implementation in Nebraska



CSMHS; ways in which school districts are implementing CSMHS; and successes, barriers, and lessons learned from CSMHS implementation. **This summary report includes results specific to the Statewide and Regional Institutes (evaluation components 1 and 2). A comprehensive evaluation of CSMHS implementation (evaluation component 3) will be included in the September 2022 annual report.**

The NUPPC will also analyze the Nebraska Mental Health Landscape Survey, administered by NDE, in the final year of the project to better understand the statewide impact of CSMHS implementation.

Statewide CSMHS Institute

The NDE hosted a Statewide Institute virtually on September 28-30, 2021. Facilitated by the Mid-America Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (MHTTC), the Institute implemented a train-the-trainer model for 44 staff representing 14 Educational Service Units (ESUs) who would later provide their own Institute. Another 20 individuals from five selected Local Education Agencies (LEA), or school districts, implementing a CSMHS or Project AWARE also attended. The Statewide Institute was evaluated using participant surveys that included both scaled and open-ended response items. Participants were invited to complete three surveys (pre-Institute, post-Institute, 3-month follow-up) to document perspectives and measure how attitudes toward CSMHS and knowledge of CSMHS concepts had changed over time. In the year following the Statewide Institute, NDE staff facilitated five technical assistance meetings for participants, held bi-monthly online. A total of 48 individuals from regional organizations or school districts working to implement CSMHS participated in these meetings.

Key evaluation findings of the Statewide Institute include:

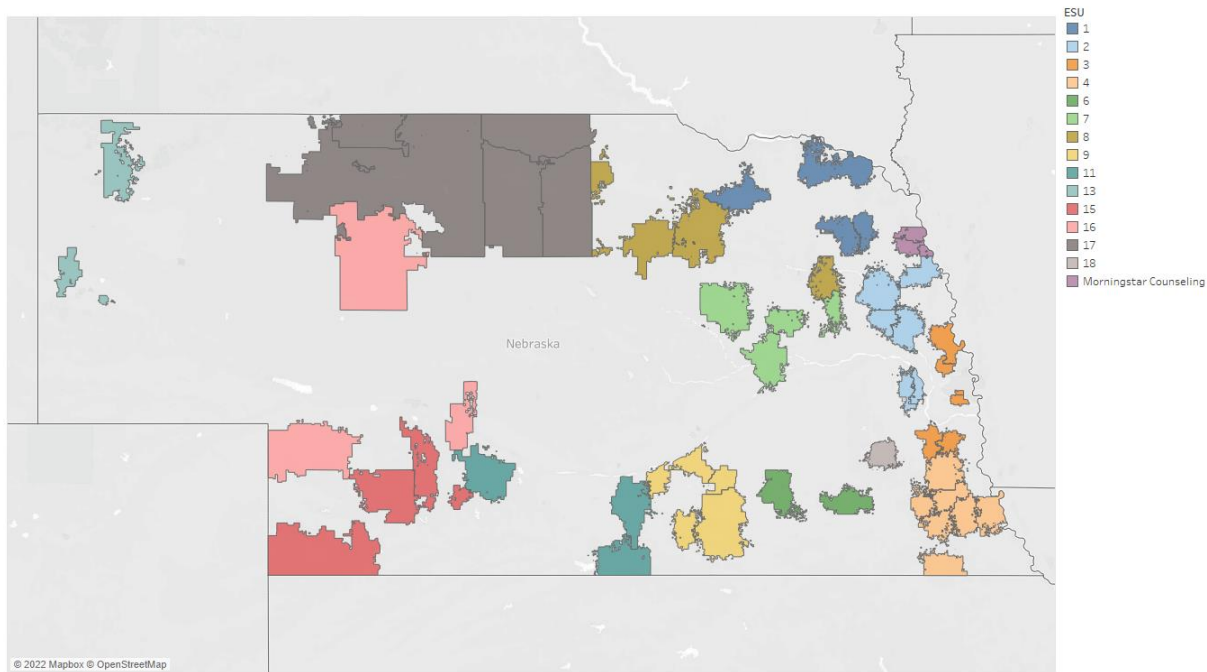
- Institute participants demonstrated markedly greater confidence in their knowledge of Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems concepts and domains after the conclusion of the Statewide Institute. This reported increase in knowledge was statistically significant ($t=-6.97$, $p<.001$) with a large effect size ($d=0.873$).

- A series of true/false knowledge-based questions were completed on all surveys (pre-Institute, post-Institute, Follow-up). The majority of respondents were able to correctly identify each statement on all surveys, with increases in knowledge related to three domains: Funding and Sustainability, Needs Assessment and Resource Mapping, and Screening.
- Participants' impressions of how difficult it would be to implement CSMHS decreased over time. From the post- to the follow-up survey, a smaller proportion (76.9% on the post-survey, 46.2% on the follow-up survey) of respondents believed that implementing CSMHS would be difficult. A larger proportion (15.4% on the post-survey, 46.1% on the follow-up survey) of respondents on the follow-up survey believed that implementation would be *Neither Difficult nor Easy*.
- Many Institute participants, when asked to specify in an open-ended question what made the implementation of CSMHS easy or difficult, pointed toward issues with resource allocation, including staff availability and funding, and the cultural stigma surrounding mental health issues as prominent barriers to success.
- The overwhelming majority of respondents on post- and follow-up surveys (greater than 90% of respondents on both surveys) indicated they believed that CSMHS would result in positive outcomes for schools and students.
- When asked to rate their agreement with a series of statements addressing their confidence in both themselves and their institutions to implement CSMHS, Institute participants reported they understood the CSMHS domains and that they felt supported by their institutions.

Regional CSMHS Institutes

Between January 1, 2022, and July 15, 2022, 14 regional teams, including ESUs and Morningstar Counseling, provided a CSMHS Regional Institute for LEAs in their region. Across the state, 423 educators representing 70 school buildings or districts participated in these Regional Institutes (Figure 2), with Institutes serving, on average, 32 educators and four school districts. To date, 92% of trained ESUs have provided a Regional Institute, with one planned for later in 2022.

Figure 3. School Districts participating in Regional CSMHS Institutes, by ESU



Teams of staff members, representing these school districts, attended the Regional Institutes. Nearly all teams included school counselors and school psychologists, however many teams also included principals and superintendents. In NDE-led technical assistance calls, ESU staff indicated that it was very important for school and district decision makers to be part of the teams attending Regional Institutes, as their input was necessary in planning and securing funding.

Regional Institutes were tailored to the unique needs and context of their region. Across the state, Regional Institutes were implemented using a variety of models.³ The most common model was a two-day or three-day Institute modeled after the Statewide Institute. Those providing a two-day Institute typically identified CSMHS modules to pull out and provide separately from the Institute; for example, providing the Teaming module before the Institute began to ensure the right members of the team attended. Other models included dividing the modules into small groups (1-2 modules) and providing them in shorter meetings provided throughout the year.

Outcomes of Regional Institutes were measured⁴ using pre-Institute, post-Institute, and follow-up surveys. To date, preliminary results of these surveys include:

- The percentage of staff members who rated their overall knowledge of the CSMHS model as *Moderately knowledgeable* or *Extremely knowledgeable* increased from 31.6% on the pre-Institute survey to 74.9% post-Institute survey.
- Staff members were also asked a series of true/false knowledge-based questions on both surveys. Correct answers comprised over 80% of responses to the knowledge-based questions

³ Information about the model implemented is still being collected from ESUs.

⁴ Data is also being collected through focus groups, which are currently underway. Findings will be detailed in the annual report.

on the pre-Institute survey. The percentage of correct answers increased or remained the same for five of the eight knowledge-based questions asked.

- Over 95% of Institute attendees indicated that they were *Satisfied* or *Very satisfied* with the Regional Institute they attended. Additionally, some attendees were interested in additional assistance; 36.7% of attendees indicated that they needed more information and/or training on components or aspects of the CSMHS model.
- 19.5% of Institute attendees indicated post-Institute that they believed it would be *Difficult* or *Very difficult* for their LEA or school to implement a CSMHS. When asked which component of a CSMHS would be the most difficult to implement, the most frequent responses included *Measuring the impact of the CSMHS* (22.7%) and *Securing funding for a sustainable model of supports* (22.0%).

Preliminary Conclusions

When taken together, the results of the Statewide Institute evaluation and the preliminary results of the Regional Institute evaluation suggest participants were satisfied with the Institutes and made important gains in knowledge related to CSMHS. Follow-up survey results for the Regional Institutes may confirm whether perceptions of difficulties in implementing CSMHS continue to fade with time; however, further training opportunities may be needed, especially on the components of the CSMHS Institute attendees believe are most difficult to implement.

NUPPC is currently completing focus groups with each of the organizations implementing CSMHS Regional Institutes, reviewing SHAPE System assessments from each Institute participant, and collecting information about participating ESUs and school districts, such as school district size and population. Full results of the evaluation of the first year of Nebraska's CSMHS Initiative will be provided in an annual report to be made available in October 2022.