

Student self-reporting can help educators catch academic and mental health problems early

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At the start of the school year, many students expect to go through the process of getting their ears and eyes checked by school nurses for hearing and vision issues. Increasingly, students might also expect to be

screened for potential mental health problems. Stephen Kilgus, an associate professor in the Department of Educational, School and Counseling Psychology in the College of Education at the University of Missouri, is analyzing how a new screening tool, which is completed by students, can help teachers identify potential academic, social and emotional problems. The data might help give teachers better tools to improve children's lives in the classroom and beyond.

Kilgus and his colleagues have developed a student version of the Social, Academic and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener (SAEBRS), which students use to provide information about their own [mental health](#). Research suggests that as students enter middle school, they tend to internalize issues. This is particularly true of conditions such as depression and anxiety. Furthermore, middle and [high school students](#) spend their school day with multiple teachers and adults, making it difficult to find a single adult who can easily track their behavior and report it accurately. Widespread use of the student version of the SAEBRS, in which students report their mental state directly, would remedy this by providing more accurate assessments for older children.

"The goal is to place these screeners within a broader service delivery framework, where we identify kids that need help, provide them with interventions and then monitor their progress over time," Kilgus said.

Schools have quickly become the primary provider for screening students for potential challenges. Kilgus said not every family in a community has access to or the ability to access behavioral support, but schools often have the manpower and resources to provide accessible preventative services. The [teacher](#) version of SAEBRS is a screening survey completed by teachers at the start of the school year to identify which students might need more support. Kilgus' objective is to pinpoint screening tools that can identify more kids who need help and bring teachers and parents in on the conversation.

"Every time we work with educators, we try to help teachers understand the role they play in providing behavioral supports to students," Kilgus said. "We also want parents to feel like they understand the process and give them a voice in how the scale and the data will be used."

Kilgus said the student version, which was given to [middle school students](#) in the study, is available through Fastbridge Learning, a software company that works with schools to offer online academic and behavioral screening, as well as other assessment services. The teacher scale also is available via FastBridge Learning and already in use with 250,000 students nationally.

"Development and validation of the social, academic and [emotional behavior](#) risk screener-student rating scale" was published in *Assessment for Effective Intervention*. Other contributors were Nathaniel von der Embse, assistant professor of school psychology at the University of South Florida; Stephanie Iaccarino, doctoral student in the educational psychology program at Temple University; Ariel Mankin, doctoral [student](#) in the [school](#) psychology program at Temple University; and Eran Magen, Director of the Center for Supportive Relationships.

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