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**Title:** Using Public Health Screening Methods to Promote Social and Emotional Development at School

**First and second choice of conference section:** 1. Research Methods; 2. Cognitive Science and its Applications

**Symposium Justification:**

Public Health concepts and methods may be one fruitful area for interdisciplinary synthesis that informs student social and emotional development practices in U.S. schools. Public Health practices have allowed researchers to introduce new concepts, constructs, and measures that, although beyond the scope of core academic subject areas, nevertheless have been documented to be associated with poor educational outcomes broadly defined. An exhaustive and influential 2009 report of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, for example, identified a preponderance of evidence to suggest that: a) children’s mental health problems are rarely detected at an early stage, and b) the late initiation of prevention or intervention strategies leads to poor outcomes across developmental domains, inclusive of schooling outcomes (O’Connell, Boat, & Warner, 2009).

One of the methods central to public health work is early and frequent screening for risk for, or presence of, a mental health disorder. The standing World Health Organization definition of screening was offered in 1968 as “…the presumptive identification of unrecognized disease of defect by the application of tests, examinations, or other procedures which can be applied rapidly” (Wilson & Jungner). These authors also noted that detection of “pre-symptomatic disease” is included as one of the goals of screening.
Another concept important in Public Health work is that of surveillance, “…which is twofold: 1) to address a defined public health problem or question, and 2) to use the data to guide efforts that will protect and promote population health” (Hall, Correa, Yoon, & Braden, 2012); in education, social and emotional skill building that protects students against poor educational outcomes.

This symposium assembles a group of researchers that has been investigating: a) the development, refinement, and application of behavioral and emotional risk screening measures, and b) the utility of the surveillance concept for the design of school-wide prevention practices for children in grades pre-K through 12 in urban schools. This work has been supported in part by two IES grants.

Paper 1 will provide an overview of public health concepts that are most applicable to school-based efforts to detect and mitigate student behavioral and emotional risk, and surveillance work conducted at the behest of school administrators in an urban school system. Paper 2 will give an example of factor analytic and Item Response Theory studies aimed at screening instrument refinement. Paper 3 will demonstrate the use of latent class analyses of screener scores as surveillance methods for identifying subgroups of students at risk, and their associated demographic characteristics.

References


Structured Abstracts: