**Title**: I got 99 goals but rewards ain’t one: alignment of identified needs and strategies among schools implementing evidence-based practices for autistic students.

**Authors**: Diana Cooney, Karolyn Maurer, Wendy Shih, David Mandell

**Introduction**: Few evidence-based interventions (EBIs) for autistic individuals are successfully implemented in under-resourced schools. Implementation failure may be due in part to a lack of planning regarding the best ways to address schools’ implementation needs. We developed and are testing an organizational strategy to help schools implement autism-related EBIs for under-resourced autistic youth (from birth to age 22). Using Novel Implementation Tools for Evidence-based intervention Delivery (UNITED) helps schools plan an implementation process for EBIs, identify gaps and needs, and set goals and action steps to address them. Schools establish an implementation team based on the results of an organizational social network analysis and met regularly and identified goals, based on a needs assessment, to support EBI implementation at their site. They use the School Based Implementation Climate Scale (SICS) to identify needs which supports appropriate goal setting. While the tool provides a straightforward way to identify implementation challenges, we know little about how the teams used this tool, and whether it resulted in alignment between identified needs and associated goals. The present study uses data from the SICS to assess whether the goals school implementation teams chose as part of their implementation plan matched the needs the SICS identified.

**Method**:

The SICS was used to assess the school’s implementation climate, which is the extent that intended users of the intervention think that the use of the intervention is expected, supported and rewarded. The scale examines seven constructs related to the evidence-based practice of interest: focus, educational support, recognition, rewards, use of data, existing supports, and integration with existing activities. SICS items are Likert-scale ranging from 0 (“not at all”) to 4 ("very great extent"). UNITED school teams (n=29) were presented with a description of needs, based on the SICS scores, prior to establishing implementation goals. At the first meeting of the UNITED team after completing the SICS, they developed implementation goals based on the highest priority need. Collectively, the 29 UNITED teams developed 99 goals. We used deductive coding based on the SICS’s seven constructs to assess the extent to which these goals met the previously identified needs. We used descriptive analyses to map these goals onto different domains. Next, we compared each team’s first goal to baseline SICS data to determine if the goal aligned with an area of need (High need = <2; Not area of need >2).

**Results**: The most common needs that the SICS identified were: *Use of Rewards*, *Data*, and *EBP Integration*. However, the top three domains in which implementation teams developed goals were: 1) *Focus*, the degree to which the school leadership prioritizes and communicates the importance of implementing evidence-based practices; 2) *Existing supports*, using established professional development time and or existing meetings to promote the use of the EBP; and 3) *Education supports*, the availability of training, professional development opportunities, and resources to help staff understand and effectively implement EBPs. The domains that teams developed the fewest goals to address were *recognition* and *rewards*.

There was a misalignment between the domains that SICS baseline data identified as high need and the domains in which school teams wrote initial goals. Among the 7 UNITED teams that developed initial goals for Focus, only 1 teams SICS results indicated Focus as high need, among the 6 UNITED teams that developed initial goals for the Use of Data and the 5 for Education Supports, none of their SICS data indicated these as areas of high need, among the 5 UNITED teams that developed initial goals for Existing Supports, only 2 teams SICS data indicated as high need.

**Discussion:** Our findings suggest a notable disconnect between the needs that school-based implementation teams identify and the goals they set as part of implementing a new program. Notably, the domain of rewards consistently emerged as a high-need area, yet only one team formulated a goal related to rewards. Most goals addressed domains that the SICS data classified as low need or that were already in practice. Several potential explanations may account for this: first, despite the teams completion of the SICS when presented with results regarding domains identified as needs, school teams may not agree or perceive these areas as priorities, suggesting that they don’t view the SICS as an effective tool in formulating implementation goals; second, school teams might find it impractical to create goals and action items within domains that cannot be embedded within existing activities, leading them to focus on enhancing existing evidence-based interventions (EBIs) and educational supports rather than establishing new systems that are essential for data collection, rewards, recognition, and EBI integration; or third, developing implementation goals may follow a sequential approach, with schools opting to first address tasks such as increasing expectations for EBI use and training before tackling reward systems. Gaining insight into the extent to which school teams used or overlooked the data is crucial for selecting appropriate tools and strategies to effectively measure and guide goal development for successful EBI implementation supports.

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