Get in Rhithm: Increasing Structured Identification of Student Wellness Needs and Improving Student Availability for Learning Through Social-Emotional Intervention

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PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Approximately one in six American youths aged 6-17 experience signs or symptoms associated with a mental health disorder each year (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2021). The fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates a rise in youth mental health needs, with more than 25% of U.S. parents reporting increasing concerns with their child's mental health between March and June 2020 (Patrick et al., 2020). With symptoms of mental health disorders regularly appearing in students within the school setting, interventions focused on identifying early signs of mental health needs are critical before student academic progress, and overall well-being is irrevocably impacted (Eccleston, 2021; Kessler et al., 2005; Ohrt et al., 2020). Having a strategic system to address student mental health needs in the school setting is imperative to account for the link between student academic achievement and overall well-being (Borntrager & Lyon, 2015). The Committee on School Health (2004) expresses how improving coordination of current service limitations through educational partnerships can prevent significant mental health concerns from taking place later in students' lives. Additionally, Nabors and Reynolds (2000) discuss reports demonstrating how supports within the school setting in the form of unique programming tailored towards mental health awareness reduced the stigma surrounding students' willingness to seek help for mental health concerns and overall helped to improve academic outcomes.

Rhithm Insights™ Descriptive Statistics

Note: This example demonstrates weekly Rhithm Insights™ data.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH IDENTIFYING EARLY SIGN OF MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

Structured Identification System

- All students require safe classrooms that aid in academic and social-emotional wellness and teachers must attend to the classroom environment to ensure that students have a healthy educational setting (Korinek, 2021).

- Limitations associated with insufficient training, limited resources, decreased availability, and environmental challenges make delivering social-emotional school services difficult (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

- Schools face a fragmented delivery system of care that often works in isolation from one another. Without a transparent, collaborative approach, teachers, counselors, school mental health providers, and administrators are regularly unaware of the concerns individual students are facing (Adelman & Taylor, 2021).

- The U.S. Department of Education (2021) recommends:
    - Establishing an integrated framework that includes educational, social-emotional, and behavioral health supports for all students.
    - Developing a program that prioritizes student schedules to include instruction and support around social-emotional and behavioral health learning.
    - Having a system that regularly collects and analyzes student and staff mental health needs to ensure that proactive decisions surrounding school mental health priorities frequently occur.

Programming to Increase Student Availability for Learning

- Self-regulation intervention is a growing concept among school settings to teach students how taking responsibility for their achievement can result in ongoing academic success (Le & Wolfe, 2013).

- Students engaged in self-regulated learning are more capable of examining the validity of their learning methods and adjusting to their observations by alternating their behavior (Le & Wolfe, 2013).

- Forms of self-regulation intervention proven to be successful include the following: (a) allowing for the use of concrete terminology and visuals to make abstract emotion identification and regulation concepts comprehensible for children; (b) releasing negative feelings/energy through the use of a fidget tool; (c) visual guidance on diaphragmatic breathing; (d) step-by-step visual guidance on how to contract and relax the body to ease tension; (e) the use of simple yoga poses; (e) using writing and drawing as a method of expression for thoughts and feelings; and (f) the use of positive imagery to aid children in shifting their thought patterns (Nowell et al., 2019).

SOLUTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH IDENTIFYING EARLY SIGN OF MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

Structured Identification System

- Rhithm, Inc.'s application framework is multifaceted and resolves a fragmented delivery of service model, by promoting collaboration among school personnel working to support individual student and whole school needs.

- The Rhithm, Inc. application aligns with the U.S. Department of Education (2021) recommendations for establishing an integrated social-emotional framework by using advanced technology to collect and analyze student mental health data regularly.
    - Data is collected using a series of five questions related to mood, energy, emotion, physical body, and social life, using a simple to understand emoji rating system (see Descriptive Statistics).

Programming to Increase Student Availability for Learning

- The Rhithm, Inc. application is in alignment with key qualities of successful self-regulation intervention as discussed by Nowell et al. (2019), including providing concrete language and visuals to help students identify and express their emotions via the simple emoji wellness check-in, and through presenting students with differentiated self-regulation strategies that support the brain's prefrontal cortex regulation.

- A team of licensed clinical professionals continually develops short video segments that provide students with activities highlighted by Nowell et al. (2019) such as deep breathing, visualization, and stretching that match the needs indicated by their Rhithm, Inc. assessment.

- Based on data outcomes, teachers and school personnel can track overall trends associated with student responses and make recommendations for individual students and/or classes (see Emoji Metrics).

- The data collected by the Rhithm, Inc. application allows for systematic climate analysis and provides school districts with the ability to respond quickly to schools demonstrating increasing or ongoing wellness concerns.

CONCLUSION

Rhithm, Inc's application is an easy-to-use mental health wellness check-in tool that allows educators to proactively shape the culture of a classroom, school, or district at any time in the instructional period. In less than three minutes each day, educators will have the information to determine how students are mentally, socially, physically, and emotionally and can proactively respond before an incident manifests in the classroom. The Rhithm, Inc. algorithm provides differentiated short K-12 aligned videos written by licensed clinicians using evidenced-based strategies to help students self-regulate immediately after taking the five-question emoji-based rating system. With concerns related to mental health, learning loss, and the achievement gap increasing due to learning inconsistency associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, Rhithm, Inc. provides a solution that is less intrusive on instructional time. Rhithm, Inc.'s application allows teachers to rapidly check in on student well-being while simultaneously ensuring their focus remains on supporting learning loss and closing the achievement gap.

Emoji Metrics

REFERENCES

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