Psychometric defensibility of the Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener (SAEBRS) Teacher Rating Scale and multiple gating procedure within elementary and middle school samples☆

Stephen P. Kilgus [a,*], Katie Eklund [b], Nathaniel P. von der Embse [c], Crystal N. Taylor [a], Wesley A. Sims [a]

[a] University of Missouri, United States
[b] University of Arizona, United States
[c] Temple University, United States

ABSTRACT

The primary purposes of this investigation were to (a) continue a line of research examining the psychometric defensibility of the Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener — Teacher Rating Scale (SAEBRS-TRS), and (b) develop and preliminarily evaluate the diagnostic accuracy of a novel multiple gating procedure based on teacher nomination and the SAEBRS-TRS. Two studies were conducted with elementary and middle school student samples across two separate geographic locations. Study 1 ($n = 864$ students) results supported SAEBRS-TRS defensibility, revealing acceptable to optimal levels of internal consistency reliability, concurrent validity, and diagnostic accuracy. Findings were promising for a combined multiple gating procedure, which demonstrated acceptable levels of sensitivity and specificity. Study 2 ($n = 1534$ students), which replicated Study 1 procedures, further supported the SAEBRS-TRS' psychometric defensibility in terms of reliability, validity, and diagnostic accuracy. Despite the incorporation of revisions intended to promote sensitivity levels, the combined multiple gating procedure's diagnostic accuracy was similar to that found in Study 1. Taken together, results build upon prior research in support of the applied use of the SAEBRS-TRS, as well as justify future research regarding a SAEBRS-based multiple gating procedure. Implications for practice and study limitations are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Schools are increasingly adopting multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) as the foundation of their social–emotional and behavioral service delivery models (e.g., positive behavior interventions and supports; Bruhn, Woods-Groves, & Huddle, 2014). MTSS models represent a prevention-orientation to addressing student needs, with a foundation in ecological theory, data-based decision making, and problem solving logic (Burns, Riley-Tillman, & VanDerHeyden, 2012). Central to the application of MTSS is the use of evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies, which vary in level of intensity in the interest of supporting a wide range of students with varying levels of need. The application of these strategies is supported by the collection of assessment data, which inform a range of intervention-related decisions. One way to gather MTSS-relevant data is via universal screening (Chafouleas, Riley-Tillman, & Sugai, 2007), defined as the use of brief assessment tools to evaluate a population (e.g., all students within an elementary school) for the purpose of identifying individuals possessing some characteristic of interest (Jenkins, Hudson, & Johnson, 2007). Within MTSS models, these characteristics correspond to risk for social–emotional and behavioral

concerns, demonstrated via subsyndromal symptomatology predictive of future disordered behavior (Kamphaus, 2012). Documentation of such risk suggests a student may have not been exposed to universal prevention strategies, or rather is unresponsive to these strategies and will require more intensive intervention to improve their social–emotional and behavioral functioning.

Universal screening represents a key component of the MTSS process, supporting early identification of students who are at risk, and thus application of subsequent intervention and assessment practices (Cook, Volpe, & Livanis, 2010). Given its noted importance, universal screening for social–emotional and behavioral concerns has received a great deal of attention within the literature, with research yielding several screening tools. Multiple categories of such tools have been identified, including (a) multiple gating procedures, (b) evaluation of extant data collected as part of normal educational practices (e.g., office discipline referrals), and (c) teacher evaluation and rating of all students on common behavioral criteria (Severson, Walker, Hope-Doolittle, Kratochwill, & Gresham, 2007). The majority of universal screening research includes this final category, representing brief rating scales comprised of a small number of Likert-scaled items (e.g., 12–30 items) that might be completed in only a few minutes.

A review of the literature reveals several examples of brief rating scale-based universal screening tools. These include the BASC-2 Behavioral and Emotional Screening System (BESS [25–30 items]; Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2007); the Social Skills Improvement System — Performance Screening Guide (SSIS-PSG [4 items]; Elliott & Gresham, 2008), the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ [25 items]; Goodman, 1997); the Student Internalizing and Externalizing Behavior Screeners (SIBS/SEBS [14 items]; Cook, 2012; Cook et al., 2011); and the Student Risk Screening Scale—Internalizing and Externalizing (SRSS-IE [12 items]; Drummond, 1994). The majority of universal screeners utilize teacher rating scales, which teachers complete by rating the frequency with which students have exhibited a range of behavior during the past one or more months. Though promising, several limitations to existing screeners have been documented (Kilgus, Chafouleas, & Riley-Tillman, 2013), including (a) limited efficiency, with some screeners including a larger number of items (e.g., BESS, SDQ); (b) limited psychometric evidence, as some screeners are supported by a rather small number of studies (e.g., SIBS/SEBS, SSIS-PSG); and (c) a focus on problem behaviors alone, with some screeners not including content specific to the positive behaviors known to predict key students outcomes (Elias & Haynes, 2008; Kwon, Kim, & Sheridan, 2012). Recognition of these concerns has spurred development of novel screening tools (e.g., Daniels, Volpe, Fabiano, & Briesch, in press; Pennefather & Smolkowski, 2015). One brief teacher screener around which evidence has begun to accumulate is the Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener — Teacher Rating Scale (SAEBRS-TRS; Kilgus, Chafouleas, Riley-Tillman, & von der Embse, 2014).

1.1. Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener

The SAEBRS-TRS is a 19-item teacher rating scale available via FastBridge (fastbridge.org), an electronic web-based system of assessment tools. Specifically, the measure serves as the foundation of behavior universal screening within the system, and is a part of a broader suite of behavior assessment tools. When considered relative to Glover and Albers' (2007) evaluative criteria for universal screening tools, the SAEBRS-TRS is considered to afford several advantages. First, research to date supports SAEBRS-TRS technical adequacy, finding the measure to evidence several desirable psychometric properties. Several studies to date have supported SAEBRS-TRS reliability (Kilgus, Sims, von der Embse, & Riley-Tillman, 2015; Kilgus, Sims, von der Embse, & Taylor, in press; Kilgus et al., 2013; von der Embse, Pendergast, Kilgus, & Eklund, in press); concurrent validity, with findings supporting its capacity to predict the Social Skills Improvement System — Rating Scales (SSIS-RS; Gresham & Elliott, 2008), SRSS, and SIBS; and diagnostic accuracy (Kilgus et al., 2013, 2015; Kilgus, Sims, et al., in press). Interestingly, these latter studies have yielded somewhat inconsistent recommendations regarding which cut scores perform best within an applied SAEBRS classification model. Specifically, whereas two previous studies yielded similar cut score recommendations (relative to the SSIS-RS as a criterion; Kilgus et al., 2013, 2015), Kilgus, Sims, et al. (in press) identified a set of cut scores that differed from those selected via the previous two studies (relative to the SRSS and SIBS as criteria). These findings collectively suggest cut scores might vary in accordance with the outcome variable under consideration, thus rationalizing the need for additional research in this area.

Second, initial data have supported the SAEBRS-TRS' contextual appropriateness. Specifically, findings have suggested the SAEBRS-TRS might be used to predict student risk across multiple behavioral domains, including (a) Social Behavior (SB; 6 items), defined as behaviors that promote (e.g., social skills) or limit (e.g., externalizing problems) one's ability to maintain age appropriate relationships with peers and adults; (b) Academic Behavior (AB; 6 items), defined as behaviors that promote (e.g., academic enablers) or limit (e.g., attentional problems) one's ability to be prepared for, participate in, and benefit from academic instruction; and (c) Total Behavior (TB; 12 items), which incorporates all SB and AB items and is considered indicative of overall behavioral functioning. Von der Embse et al. (in press) expanded the comprehensiveness of the SAEBRS-TRS by introducing a new Emotional Behavior (EB; 7 items) subscale that is comprised of actions that promote (e.g., social–emotional competencies) or limit (e.g., internalizing problems) one's ability to regulate internal states, adapt to change, and respond to stressful/challenging events.

Third, initial SAEBRS-TRS research has yielded a brief screener considered to possess high usability, requiring a single rater to complete a small number of low effort suboperation actions (i.e., 19 Likert scale items). Such efficiency in instrumentation and proceduralization suggests the screener is likely to be highly acceptable to teachers, administrators, and other support staff (Kilgus et al., 2013, 2015). With that said, our experiences in the schools have also revealed general educator concerns regarding the efficiency of the overall screening process. A common question from teachers pertains to why it is necessary to screen all students, including (a) those they perceive as evidencing no risk of social–emotional or behavioral concerns, and (b) those they perceive as clearly evidencing risk for such concerns. Teachers contend that by ruling out these students and only evaluating those for whom risk status is uncertain, the universal screening process would become far more efficient.

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