

Speaker 1: Our next guest that we have with us on the podcast is Dr. Michelle Riske-Morris, who is a Senior Research Associate at Case Western Reserve University and a Lead Evaluator for Safe School/Healthy Students in Ohio. Thank you so much for joining us today, Michelle.

Michelle R-M: Thank you, I'm glad to be a part of this.

Speaker 1: Absolutely. We had a couple questions we wanted to ask you today. First of all, we know that everyone who works in schools is just always so busy and we're curious if you have any data collection tips you can offer to our listeners that they might use to ensure that students, parents, teachers, school administrators or others actually involved in the school based mental health promotion, youth violence prevention programs, actually submit the data that your evaluation needs? I know that there are a lot of data collection asks for those working in schools and that can be really a tall order. Just any data collection tips you have about that, we would love to hear about.

Michelle R-M: Okay. The one thing that I notice with large projects, especially involving the schools and like you mentioned, having data coming from a variety of sources such as staff, school administrators, parents, and students is to, at the outset of any project and I do this every year, in the beginning sit down with everybody who's potentially going to be providing you with data. Not just the project directors who in turn say, "We'll get that for you." I actually try to meet with everybody who is going to be involved in the data collection. We talk about what's expected, what the data will entail, answer any questions.

I then develop what I call a crosswalk, where I identify all the various data collection activities that are going to be encompassed within that year, put timeframes as to when the data I need that by, sometimes it's reporting it monthly, sometimes it's quarterly, sometimes it's yearly, who's responsible for it, and what format will it be in. Will it be in a log? Will it be in an Excel spreadsheet? Then I in turn develop the data collection tools, such as a lot of times I'll develop an Excel spreadsheet with dropdown boxes so that it's relatively easy for a teacher to highlight their school, what grade, and the type of data collection they will do.

Once I do those then I will try to meet with those individuals separately. We'll meet with all the teachers, if we're collecting information for a particular program. Then we'll have them utilize the tool. To make sure they understand them, we develop little code books and guide books to help them through that. Then we always try to, with any data collection is, even though you might not need it until the end of the year for a year end report, such as with the Safe School/Health Students grant, I request the information quarterly or monthly so I can see how they're submitting the information to determine whether or not they're capturing it accurately, because it's always best if we can correct it now

versus at the end of the data collection. If it involved more than a year, the next year I meet with them and we go over it again just to remind everybody.

The next thing that I always do is whenever we're doing data collection, if it's going to be something that's done yearly, I try to do around the same time, so that everybody knows that, oh, it's spring, we're going to do a parent survey. We don't try to vary it up. We try to do them at the same time so people get used to, oh, we know that they're going to be doing data collection this time. Another thing that's important with data collection is we try to ... Sometimes it's very difficult to provide incentives, especially when you're working with parents and students, but I have worked with some schools who have been creative. For example, if you can provide an incentive for completing, such as a survey, especially with everybody's time being so busy, that really helps to improve your response rates.

One school, for example, if the parents turned in the surveys, those kids got extra recess. They did stuff like that. For the teachers, the Superintendent donated gift cards and so the teachers that completed the surveys got their name put in for the chance to win a gift card. Those are some things that really help out for doing that. Then, the last thing that I would mention is that with data collection and you're implementing programs, try to incorporate data collection that also looks at how the program's being implemented. Not just collecting your outcomes, but are we implementing the program as planned? I always encourage, with any type of data collection, that you have some type of implementation checklist. You're not just collecting the outcomes, you're also collecting more of the process.

Then in terms of the process, we've also done where we've given teachers or social workers, therapists, in the schools, notebooks and asked them, they can do it on Excel if they're more comfortable with that or they can just jot it down in a notebook, but capturing those important stories. Little things that may not come across through a normal, standardized collection data tool. What are some unique experiences or what are some barriers or challenges that you've experienced? That is very helpful as well in painting the picture and telling the story.

Speaker 1: Thank you. Thank you for sharing all of that. I'm curious if you have any related tips on how to actually support other's use of these evaluation data for quality improvement? You started talking a little bit about capturing the stories and the implementation checklist types of measures, but how do you support these data actually being used?

Michelle R-M: Well, I'm usually involved in terms of being hired as an evaluator of a project. We come in, generally speaking, the evaluation is paid as part of the grant that the agency, or the organization, and schools receive. We're there for three years, maybe four, and then when we're done, they get so used to us providing the data and we do that in terms of reports, we do presentations, we do Fact Sheets, to try to get the word out about the data in a variety of mediums so that

the parents understand, the administrators understand, the community organizations who partner in administrating the grant, learn about what's happening. You do have to tailor those pieces of communication to fit that audience, which we have learned really helps. Even using social media in terms of Facebook to just share potential highlights that are happening.

With us being there, we try to communicate that data and outcome to the respective parties as much as we can and in different formats to reach all audiences. The other thing that I try to encourage is that once we're done, sometimes the data collection ends. I often encourage the schools to continue collecting that data, if they can. I will usually work with the school data coordinator and say, "What data did your Superintendent, or your schools, or your parents find most useful and that you would like to continue doing?" We work and try to modify it a little bit, so that they continue to collect that data and look at what those results are.

Even doing a simple survey where a parent survey may be reduced from 15 questions, maybe, to four question, so that they just get that information and they use Survey Monkey to survey the parents. We encourage them to continue to collect that data. I also encourage them to continue monitoring the programs in terms of implementation. One of the things we find is that as the programs get implementation there's a lot of support initially and then as time goes by, if you don't monitor staff and ensure that they're still implementing it according to the way it was designed, you may not still get the results that you had initially. We call it drift. I call it program drift. Some people drop out, others may modify it and only do a portion of it.

I strongly encourage school administrators to appoint somebody like a coach to continue on looking at those programs and encouraging the staff and the teachers to ensure that they are implementing it. Doing booster sessions, again, each year to say, "Are we going to continue doing Packs? If we're going to continue doing packs, how are we going to do it? Who's still on board? Do we need anybody new trained?" I often encourage that as well part of that continual data collection really helps in terms of continue to identify needs, where things are not being met, where do we still have gaps? Then for sustainability. Programs just don't end in terms of their cost. New teachers need trained, new staff may be on board.

You may find, for example with school based mental health services, you're doing great, but all of a sudden your need is growing as more and more parents, school staff, and administrators learn about the benefits of allowing these children to receive these services while in the school, the need may grow. You have to be able to monitor that to make sure that you're meeting that need.

Speaker 1:

Wonderful. It's so helpful and I appreciate you talking about the sustainability of data collection and monitoring those programs in ways that are something that the school can take on internally. In terms of the local evaluation there in Ohio, before we let you go, I just want to hear a little bit about what's happening

there and in particular is there anything very innovative you'd like us to know about that's going on with Safe Schools/Healthy Students in Ohio?

Michelle R-M:

Yes. I'm very proud of the work that we're doing in Ohio. I'm smiling because I really am. I think that we've accomplished a lot. One of the most innovative things that I think Ohio has to offer is that with our project site, each project site developed their own program, services, and how they were going to implement school based mental health services. One of the outcomes of that is Ohio now has a platform to say not every program fits everybody. One size doesn't fit all. They now have three model sites that actually did things differently. We're starting to communicate that out to other schools in Ohio to say, "There are different things that you could do to try to implement school based mental health services."

For example, one county, they started with Care Coordinators in the schools and the Care Coordinators would work with the students and administration to identify the students in need and then refer them out for community based mental health services. Some of the community based services would come into the school to provide those services. The schools got so used to that, that they actually picked up the Care Coordinators in terms of sustainability. Then they partnered with the hospitals, because the hospitals also realized the importance of these service and now they hospitals are actually providing school based mental health therapists in the schools.

In another school district, they did the traditional route. Very small school, very small district, they only have three schools, and for them, with this small rural county, they don't have a lot of community based providers in the area even to come into the schools or to provide school based mental health services. They, in turn, hired staff within the schools and then that worked for them and they were able to sustain those therapists in the school with the grant ending.

The last site already had, through their ESC, a section or a division of their ESC that provided school based mental health services within the districts. Then the districts would, in turn, contract with the ESC to provide those services. What they ended up doing was expanding to include school based mental health services for their pre-school population and doing education and training for the teachers. That's just one example of how you have three different sites do the same thing in that they provided school based mental health services, but they all did them in a unique way and now by learning you get the barriers, the challenges within each, and so other school districts in Ohio can now benefit to find out what's going to work for them? Which model would best suit their needs.

Speaker 1:

Yeah. That sounds like each of those sites were able to do something a little bit different and it's going to be a great model for scaling up in Ohio. Can you tell our listeners, what does ESC stand for in Ohio?

Michelle R-M:

Oh, I'm sorry. Educational Service Center.

Speaker 1: Oh, got it. Thank you.

Michelle R-M: Within a county, or a couple tri-counties, they oversee the various districts.

Speaker 1: Wonderful. Yes. I know that other states across the country, especially if they're rural or if they have districts that band together to provide educational services or mental health services, will do that. Well, thank you so much, Michelle, for your time today, and all of your expertise, and giving us a behind-the-scenes look at Ohio, but also some data collection tips. Thanks for joining us on the podcast.

Michelle R-M: Thank you very much.