



Board Policy Equity Lens Tool

Title of board policy being reviewed:

JHDB-Mental Health Screening Exemptions

Describe the purpose of this policy:

This policy provides important protections around a sensitive area of student health. Its equity strengths include advance notice, transparency about the screening process, student and family opt-out rights, and protection of screening results from inclusion in educational records. Its effectiveness will depend largely on ensuring that every student and family receives and understands the information necessary to make an informed choice.

What is your experience with this policy:

This is a very limited policy that primarily establishes where responsibility for admissions resides. From an equity perspective, its effectiveness depends heavily on the policies and practices of MESD's component districts. Regular review of referral and enrollment patterns across districts would be particularly important for determining whether students have equitable access to MESD programs.

What is the plan to communicate this policy to staff, students, and/or families? What is the plan to communicate this policy to linguistically diverse students and their families?

This policy and a summary of this policy will be available on the MESD web page. The summary of this policy is also available on the MESD website in Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Somali, and Vietnamese and, upon request, the summary and/or policy may be translated into other languages.

Is this policy:

Easy to locate for staff?

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Accessible to students and families?

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Included in onboarding, intake, or other training?

This policy will be available in the Board's online handbook. The policy will also be posted on the district website for easy access.

Clear and easy to understand?

Yes. The policy clearly explains the right to opt out, the required notification timeline, what information must be included in the notice, and how screening results are handled. The ability to decline participation either in writing beforehand or orally on the day of screening is also clearly stated.

People

How are people affected positively or negatively by the policy? What potential barriers might people encounter? What barriers might be reduced by this policy?

The policy positively affects students and families by protecting personal choice and privacy and requiring transparency about who administers screenings and who can access the results.

Potential barriers include language differences, literacy needs, unstable housing or mailing addresses, and families not receiving or understanding mailed notices. The ability for students or families to decline participation on the day of screening helps reduce some access and communication barriers.

Can you identify the racial or ethnic groups affected by this policy, program, practice, or decision? Do you know the potential impacts to these populations? If you don't know, how will you find out?

The policy applies to students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. The policy itself does not identify particular groups as disproportionately affected.

However, cultural differences in perceptions of mental health and varying levels of trust in educational or healthcare systems may influence participation. Culturally and linguistically accessible communication can help ensure all families are able to make informed decisions.

Were these populations involved in any way, at any point in the development, implementation, and evaluation of this policy? If so, when and how?

The policy does not indicate whether students, families, or specific communities were involved in its development. It primarily reflects state requirements related to mental health screenings and student and parent rights.

Future implementation and review could include student and family feedback about whether screening notices and exemption procedures are understandable and accessible.

What priorities and commitments are communicated by this policy?

The policy communicates commitments to student privacy, informed choice, transparency, and family rights. It demonstrates that participation in broad mental health screenings should not occur without advance notice and an opportunity for students or families to decline.

The requirement that screening results not become part of the student's educational record also demonstrates a strong commitment to confidentiality.

Place

What kind of positive or negative environment are we creating?

What are the barriers to more equitable outcomes? (e.g. mandated, political, emotional, financial, programmatic or managerial)

The policy creates an environment that respects student and family autonomy while allowing MESD to provide mental health screening opportunities.

Barriers to equitable outcomes may include language and literacy differences, cultural stigma surrounding mental health, unreliable mailing addresses, limited understanding of screening purposes, and concerns about confidentiality.

Power

How is the power of decision-making shared with those it affects?

How have you intentionally involved the communities affected by this policy, program, practice, or decision?

This policy provides significant individual decision-making authority by allowing either the student, parent, or guardian to request that the student not participate. Importantly, students themselves can exercise this choice, including orally on the day of the screening.

Power-sharing could be strengthened further by involving students and families in evaluating how screening information and exemption procedures are communicated.

Process

Does the policy, program, or decision improve, worsen, or make no change to existing disparities?

Does it create other unintended consequences?

The policy can improve equity by establishing consistent rights and protections for all students and families. However, disparities could remain if some families are less likely to receive or understand the required notice.

An unintended consequence could be that students who might benefit from screening do not participate because of misunderstanding, stigma, or mistrust rather than an informed decision. Conversely, students may participate because they did not receive or understand the notice.

Plan

How will you reduce the negative impacts and address the barriers?

Negative impacts can be reduced by providing notices in accessible, plain-language, and multilingual formats; using additional communication methods when appropriate; clearly explaining privacy protections and the purpose of screening; and ensuring students understand their own right to decline participation.

MESD can also review participation and exemption patterns to identify whether communication or access barriers are affecting particular student populations.