



BIRCh Center

Development and Implementation of the Massachusetts School-Based Behavioral Health Technical Assistance Center

Annual Progress Report
2024-2025



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Acknowledgements and Thanks

The BIRCh Center’s work would not be possible without the support and trust of:

- Massachusetts Department of Mental Health
- Boston Children’s Hospital
- Children’s Mental Health Campaign
- Boston Public Schools Behavioral Health Services
- Walker Therapeutic and Educational Programs and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- The Statewide, Central, and Western Mass School-based Behavioral Health Advisory Boards

These partnerships that anchor our work represent more than collaboration—they embody a shared commitment to transforming how Massachusetts supports young people’s behavioral health. The confidence these organizations place in our center enables us to bridge research and practice, creating pathways to care.

The BIRCh Center graduate students deserve special recognition and appreciation for contributing to this report, including Diana Laenen, Ritushree Bagepalli, Jacqueline Osborn, Paige Pannozzo, Julia Kausel, and Julie Tanguay.

Executive Summary: BIRCh Center's Key Improvements and Growth Highlights 2024-2025

These improvements demonstrate some of the results of the BIRCh Center's successful scaling from a pilot project to a comprehensive, statewide technical assistance infrastructure with sustained funding, expanded geographic reach, and measurable impact on Massachusetts' school-based behavioral health systems.

Expanded Geographic Reach and Service Delivery

- Tier 3 demonstration districts **tripled** from two Western Massachusetts only to six across Western and Central Massachusetts
- Regional expansion: Successfully launched Central Massachusetts operations with inaugural Advisory Board (37 members from 10 school districts)
- Hired two regional directors that have experience as district leaders

Increased Engagement and Resource Utilization

- Learning module participation increased **8%** via learning management system
- YouTube engagement increased **24%**
- Hospital to School Transition Protocol registrations increased **25%**
- School Psychologists and Medicaid Module certificates awarded increased **8%**

Professional Development and Training Expansion

- New TIES Teacher Training reached **80 educators** across Massachusetts in hybrid delivery model
- Crisis preparedness scaling: **5** PREPaRE Workshop 2 sessions plus **1** Training of Trainers delivered to 120 participants
- Specialized conference impact: 2025 Mental Health and Education Impact Forum served **85+ professionals** from **32 school districts**

Program Maturation and Quality Improvements

- Formalized center status: Transitioned from "BIRCh Project" to official "BIRCh Center" within UMass Boston
- Evaluation framework development: Partnered with WestEd to refine theory of change and create comprehensive evaluation plan
- Website modernization

Community Partnerships Strengthening

- Statewide advisory board now represents **34 agencies**
- Regional collaboration: 2025 forum brought together representatives from **32 school districts** and **24 partner organizations**

About the BIRCh Center

The Massachusetts School-Based Technical Assistance Center (SBBH TA Center) is grounded in an equity-driven, [Interconnected Systems Framework](#) (ISF), organized into three tiers at varying levels of intensity (Barrett et al., 2013). The SBBH TA Center was legislatively funded within the budget of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts through the Department of Mental Health (fiscal year 2025) and will be funded through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for the upcoming year.

Tier 1 initiatives focus on creating a statewide infrastructure to fully deploy the TA Center's work, including:

- Facilitating a statewide school-based behavioral health advisory board
- Building the capacity of a central TA center office at UMass Boston
- Implementing a regionalized approach to Technical Assistance
- Providing online resources and training (e.g., asynchronous learning modules, protocols and toolkits, live trainings)

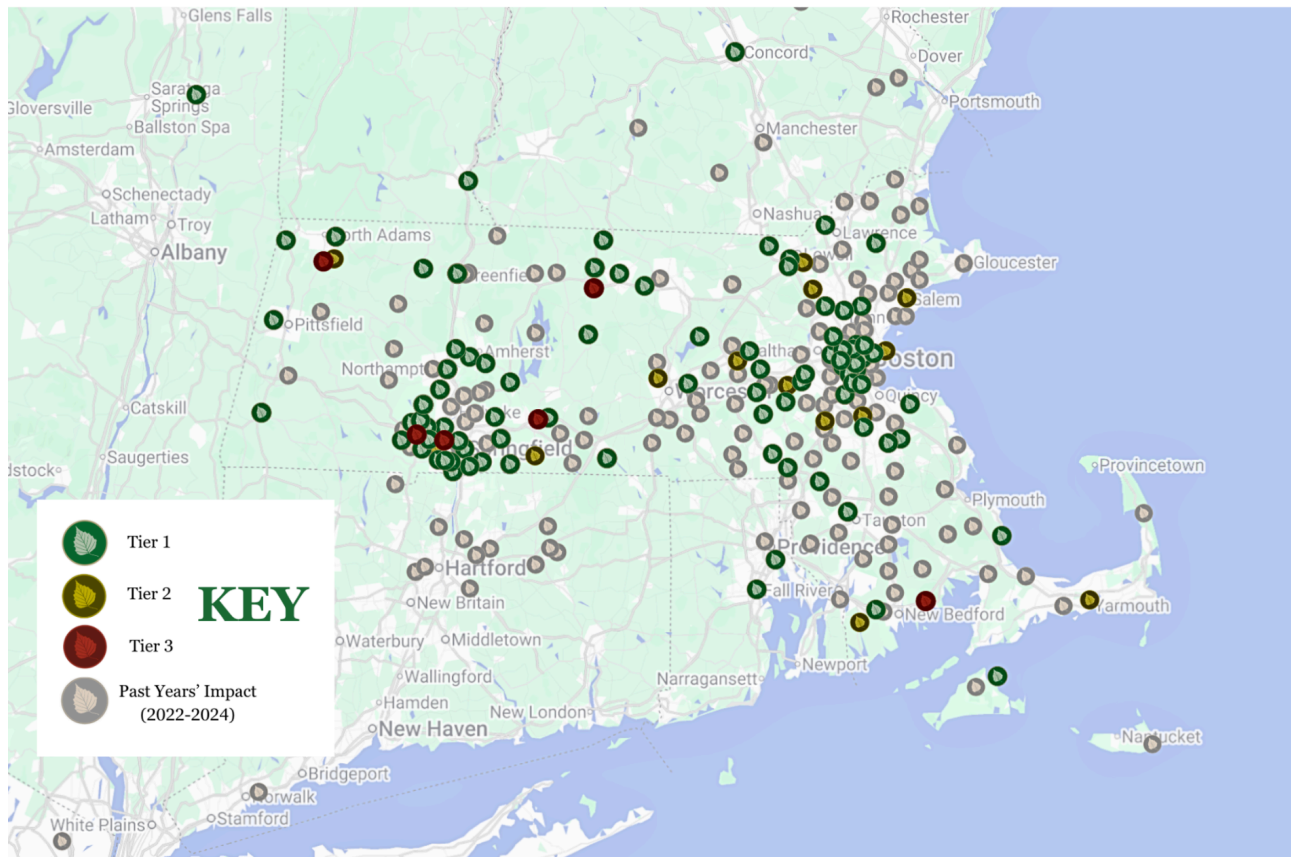
Tier 1 resources and training are available to all schools, districts, and community partners in the Commonwealth. During this past year, the TA Center served **69 Massachusetts school districts** and shared resources, materials, consultation, and trainings with **26 other organizations** depicted in the map below.

Tier 2 training and services support providers, schools, districts, and communities with targeted Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) focused on universal behavioral health screening and data-based decision making. **18 districts** were served at Tier 2.

Tier 3 offers consultation and coaching for demonstration districts in four Western Massachusetts and two Central Massachusetts school districts. The SBBH TA Center provides individualized coaching and needs assessment to inform the development of District-Community Leadership Teams and ongoing efforts for district coordination, implementation, and evaluation of behavioral health efforts.

This map depicts the reach of BIRCh Center initiatives. Each leaf represents a participant in our Tier 1 (green), Tier 2 (yellow), or Tier 3 (red) programs for the 2024-2025 academic year. The gray icons represent our impact from years past.

BIRCh Center 2022-2025 Impact



TA Center 2024-2025 Updates

The TA Center Mission

The BIRCh Project received approval from UMass Boston to become a Center in January 2025. As a result of our expanded mission, the BIRCh Center has adopted a new mission statement:

*The BIRCh Center advances **equitable interconnected behavioral health systems** that support children and their caregivers in Massachusetts by building **school districts' capacities** for implementation of **integrated behavioral health, fostering community partnerships, providing pre-service training and professional development, and advancing best practices through translational research.***

The goals of the TA Center are to:

1. Strengthen **school districts' capacity** to promote wellness, including behavioral health
2. Enhance **partnerships** between school districts, and with state and community agencies/organizations
3. Develop the children's school-based **behavioral health workforce**
4. Improve access to, and effectiveness of, high-quality and culturally and contextually

responsive school-based behavioral health services

The TA Center's theory of change improves children's access to prevention and evidence-based services by strengthening tiered behavioral health supports and community partnerships. Operating across district, community, regional, and state levels, the Center builds resources and enhances existing structures.

A Public Health Approach to Statewide Technical Assistance

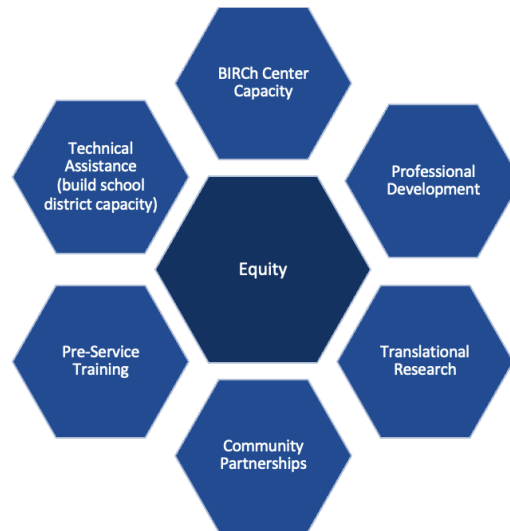
The work of the TA Center is grounded in an equity-driven, Interconnected Systems Framework (ISF), organized into three tiers at varying levels of intensity (Barrett et al., 2013). An ISF is a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) that integrates community behavioral health supports to create and sustain comprehensive school behavioral health systems. Please refer to our website to learn more about the [TA Center's history and development](#) and review our [previous annual reports](#).

- At the TA Center's universal Tier 1 level, all districts can access online learning modules, live training, and protocols/toolkits to guide the implementation of best practices.
- At the targeted Tier 2 level, districts and community agencies can access Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to provide ongoing coaching.
- Tier 3 offers individualized coaching to demonstration districts in Central and Western Massachusetts based on readiness for systems change. The Spring 2025 regional conference connected collaborators across both regions to network and plan comprehensive behavioral health initiatives.

Developing a Comprehensive Evaluation Plan

BIRCh partnered with [WestEd](#) evaluators this year to refine our theory of change and our logic model, developing a comprehensive evaluation plan. The Center's work is now guided by six core practices: 1) center capacity, 2) technical assistance, 3) pre-service training, 4) community partnerships, 5) translational research, and 6) professional development, with equity central to all efforts. Our logic model maps inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes for Center implementation.

BIRCh Center Core Practices



Staffing

The BIRCh team comprises faculty and staff from UMass Boston and Boston Children's Hospital. Leadership includes an **executive director**, **co-director**, **two regional TA Center Directors** for Central and Western Massachusetts, and a **Project Director** who coordinates statewide efforts with **10 doctoral students** in School and Counseling Psychology. Internal and external consultants provide guidance on implementation, evaluation, culturally responsive practices, workforce development, and communications.

Funding

We continue to be grateful to the legislators and the [Children's Mental Health Campaign](#) for their tremendous and tireless advocacy in helping to secure significant investments in children's behavioral health during a difficult budget season. We are hopeful the TA Center will remain a priority in the state budget for years to come.

The BIRCh Center secured significant funding through multiple sources:

- **State Legislature:** \$500,000 (2025) and \$700,000 (2026), secured through advocacy by farsighted legislators and the Children's Mental Health Campaign
- **Bipartisan Safer Communities Act:** \$300,000 for crisis response and preparedness, supported by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health, an invaluable supporter of and partner in these areas
- **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:** A three-year, \$2.5 million grant to expand Medicaid reimbursement for school-based behavioral health services in partnership with MassHealth School-Based Medicaid Program
- **Boston Children's Hospital Collaboration for Community Health:** A three-year grant to continue the BIRCh Fellows program supporting students from historically marginalized backgrounds in behavioral health graduate training programs

This report summarizes progress across all three tiers of SBBH TA Center implementation during the 2024-2025 school year. Refer to our Resource Guide that will be accessible on our website for more detailed project information.

Translational Research

The BIRCh team remains committed to contributing to closing the research to practice gap through engaging in research that is directly linked to the implementation of school mental health best practices. The research has focused on the topics of culturally-responsive and trauma-informed care within a tiered system, effective mentorship of diverse school behavioral health professionals, development of a shared behavioral health language, care coordination and wraparound between schools and community agencies, collaboration between mobile crisis teams and schools, and advancing equity through statewide implementation of school-behavioral health services. The research has been disseminated in journals as well as at regional and national conferences, including the Advancing School Mental Health conference, which is sponsored by the Center for School Mental Health at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, and at the National Association of School Psychologists.

Research by the Numbers: 2024-2025

4

National Presentations

5

Statewide Presentations

10

Doctoral Students Trained

7

Regional/Local Presentations

4

PhD Dissertations Defended

3

Accepted and Published Articles

Services & Supports and Outputs & Outcomes

Tier 1

All schools, districts, and community partners across the Commonwealth can access the Center's Tier 1 resources and training.

Leadership/Statewide School-Based Behavioral Health Advisory Board (SBBH)

Since 2020, the board has met quarterly. Its membership represents **34 agencies**, organizations, districts, universities, and hospitals from across the Commonwealth. The SBBH board's mission is to *center equity as we build knowledge and create advocacy strategies in efforts to improve access to school-based behavioral health services and supports.*

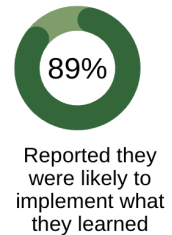
Organizations represented on Statewide School-Based Behavioral Health Advisory Board (SBBH)

Boston Children's Hospital: Accountable Care Organization, Government Relations, Neighborhood Partnership	Boston Medical Center	Boston Public Schools	Brookline Center including BRYT and the Massachusetts School-Based Telebehavioral Health Project
Children's Mental Health Campaign	Eliot Community Human Services	Federation for Children with Special Needs	Franciscan's Hospital
Health Care For All	Health Law Advocates	Higher Ground Boston	Mass General Brigham Hospital
MassHealth	Massachusetts Alliance for School-Based Health Centers (MASBHC)	Massachusetts Association for Mental Health	Massachusetts Bureau of Community Health and Prevention
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	Massachusetts Department of Mental Health	Massachusetts Department of Public Health	Methuen Public Schools
Office of the Child Advocate	Parent Professional Advocacy League (PPAL)	Rennie Center	SEL4MA
TeachPlusMA: Chelsea, Lowell, and North Reading Public Schools	The Baker Center for Children and Families	The Home for Little Wanderers	The NAN Project
Trails to Wellness	UMass Amherst	UMass Boston	Walker Therapeutic and Educational Programs
	William James College	Worcester State University	

School-Based Medicaid Project

BIRCh is partnering with the MassHealth School-Based Medicaid Program (SBMP) to develop a comprehensive model for school-based behavioral health that integrates Medicaid claiming requirements. This project increases Local Education Agencies' capacity to provide evidence-based behavioral health services by maximizing Medicaid reimbursement opportunities, which typically go underutilized. In Spring 2025, the BIRCh Center hosted a conference for Medicaid coordinators and school-based behavioral health leaders to celebrate successes, build skills, and expand engagement in school-based reimbursement systems.

This event, [Beyond Billing: Honoring Our Work, Building Our System](#), aimed to build understanding of current practices and expand Medicaid coordinators' and school-based behavioral health leaders' skills in implementing and billing for Medicaid behavioral health services.



To understand Medicaid reimbursement practices, the BIRCh Center identified effective districts across all geographic regions, sizes, and student populations that successfully submit behavioral health claims. These districts completed SBMP Needs Assessments through Qualtrics surveys and semi-structured Zoom interviews to explore structural, administrative, and staffing factors contributing to their success. Over **21 interviews** have been conducted to inform future technical assistance offerings.

Online Resources Under Development

The Center launched its new website this year (<https://thebirchcenter.org/>) which attracted **1,737 views** with **720 unique users**. The most consulted resources were:

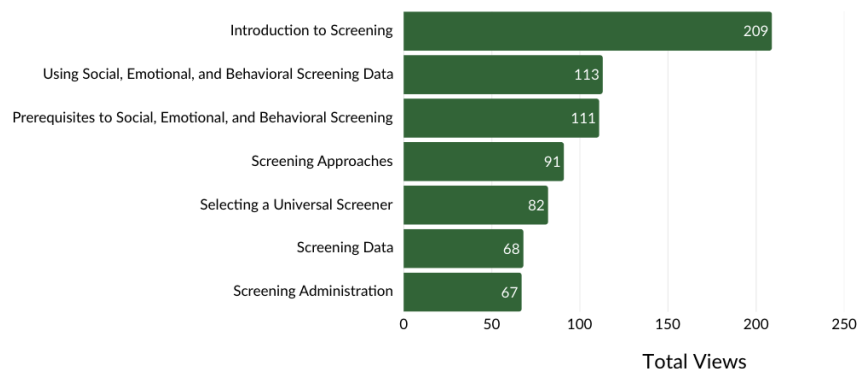
1. [Technical Assistance Center Services](#)
2. [Find Massachusetts Behavioral Health Resources](#)
3. [Resource Library](#)

Learning Modules

Participants access online training modules on YouTube and Echo360, the BIRCh Center's learning management system (LMS). The LMS tracks progress and has awarded 257 participants since inception with certificates to apply toward their license renewals/DESE Professional Development Points (PDPs). The YouTube videos have received **8,544 views**.

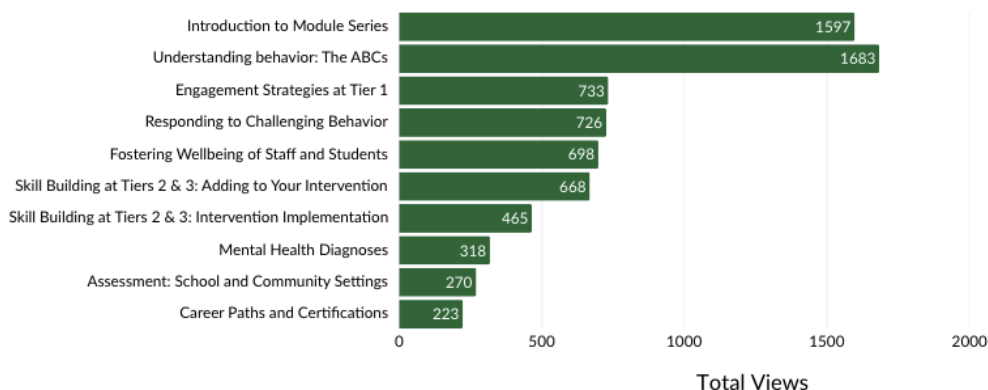
Universal Behavioral Health Screening Module Series

These **seven** modules guide school teams in developing systems, refining universal screening practices, and connecting screening data to interventions. **73 participants** signed up on Echo360, with **17 completing the series** for certificates. YouTube videos received **741 total views** as follows:



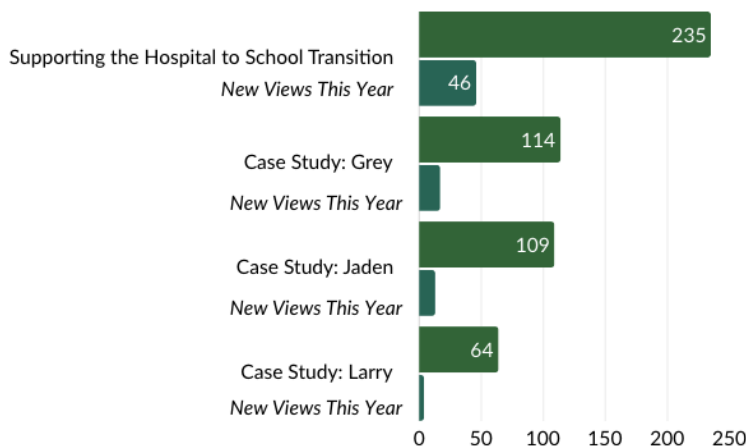
Trainings for Paraprofessionals and Mentors Module Series

The BIRCh Center partnered with the [Office of the Child Advocate](#) to create a **10-module** training curriculum and a facilitation guide that equips professionals with live training and coaching to deliver culturally responsive and trauma-informed assessment, prevention, and intervention strategies. As of July 2025, **38 participants** signed up to access the modules on Echo360, while YouTube videos have been viewed **7,381 times**, with **1,838 new views** this year as follows:



Hospital to School Transition Module Series

The Hospital to School Transition series offers **five** modules to help schools develop policies and improve collaboration with agencies to support youth returning to school behavioral health hospitalizations. As of July 2025, **20 participants** accessed these modules, with one earning a completion certificate. On YouTube, the videos have received **606 views**.



School Psychologists and Medicaid Module

The BIRCh Center and MassHealth's School-Based Medicaid Program developed a free training module to help school districts access federal Medicaid reimbursement for school psychologist services. As of July 2025, **124 participants** signed up for the module on Echo360, with **27 certificates of completion** issued.

Mobile Crisis School Collaboration Module

This online module improves partnerships between school and mobile crisis staffs for responsive crisis intervention services. Based on the BIRCh Center's Mobile Crisis Toolkit, this provides best practices and resources to build sustained partnerships. This toolkit was studied in a BIRCh research team member's dissertation in 2024-2025. **Two participants** signed up via the LMS.

Protocols and Toolkits

Hospital to School Transition Protocol

The BIRCh team developed a comprehensive, research-based tool to guide students' return-to-school transitions after behavioral health hospitalizations. As of July 2025, **322 participants** had signed up for this protocol. Schools and districts can contact exemplar organizations to learn more, such as [Bridge for Resilient Youth in Transition \(BRYT\)](#), a program of The Brookline Center for Community Mental Health.

Telehealth Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

The BIRCh Center team created a Telehealth Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) template to help schools and telebehavioral health providers to outline partnership components, and mutual obligations for effective and cooperative service delivery. Thus far, **four individuals** have signed up to receive the document since it has been added to the new website this year. The team is currently creating a 90-minute training module on how to use the document, which will be released in the next school year.

TA Center Tips and Tools Seminars

BIRCh delivered a live School-Wide Information System (SWIS) Refresher training on data-driven systems and decision-making. Responding to declining live seminar attendance in the previous year, the team hosted **one two-hour virtual session** covering practical takeaways for documenting and analyzing school behavioral data at the start of the school year. **13 educators registered**; with **four attending** from **four districts** including PBIS coaches, consultants, administrators, and behavior analysts. Participants earning 80% or above on post-tests received certificates. Two participants completed the pre- and post-test, but scores showed no knowledge gains, perhaps due to participants' prior knowledge of SWIS.

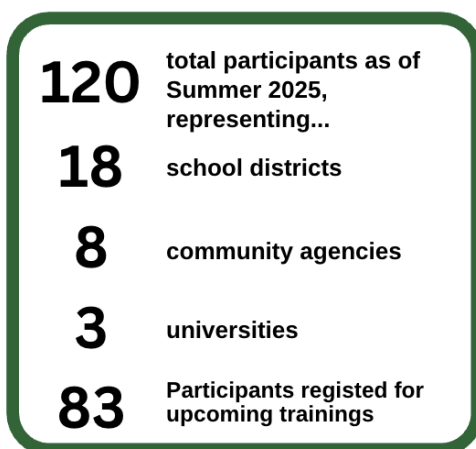


PREPaRE Trainings

The BIRCh Center implemented the PREPaRE curriculum from the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) as part of a statewide effort. This evidence-based training equips school professionals and community partners to prevent, prepare for, and respond to school crises. Focus centered on PREPaRE Workshop 2, which provides in-depth training in immediate mental health crisis interventions following school-based traumatic events. Participants learn to support students, staff, and community members exposed to acute traumatic stressors and connect them to ongoing trauma-informed and psychotherapeutic services.

This initiative was supported by federal grant funding and administered through the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH). The BIRCh Center facilitated **five** PREPaRE Workshop 2 sessions, **one** Training of Trainers (TOT), and **one** Workshop 1 session. In collaboration with NASP, the Center is piloting an enhanced TOT model where newly trained facilitators co-present with experienced trainers, progressing from secondary to primary presenter roles to build skills and confidence. These efforts advance statewide capacity for comprehensive, coordinated, trauma-informed crisis prevention and response in schools.

Quick Facts: PREPaRE Workshop 2



"The fact that this valuable training was offered to me for free made it more accessible for not only me but my entire team. This is important because crisis prevention and intervention is a team effort that requires planning time, coordination, and shared understanding of best practices."

Workshop 2 Participant

"This was one of the best, most practical professional development workshops I have attended. Being able to go with other mental health professionals in my school was extremely valuable...This should be a required workshop for all school crisis teams."

Workshop 2 Participant

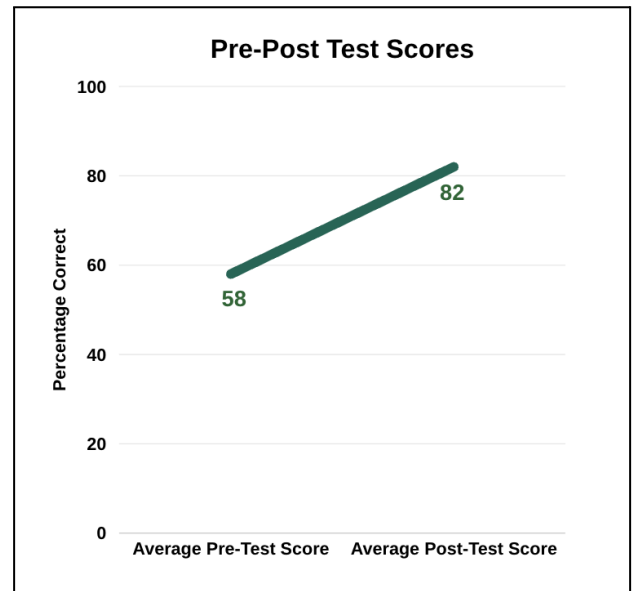
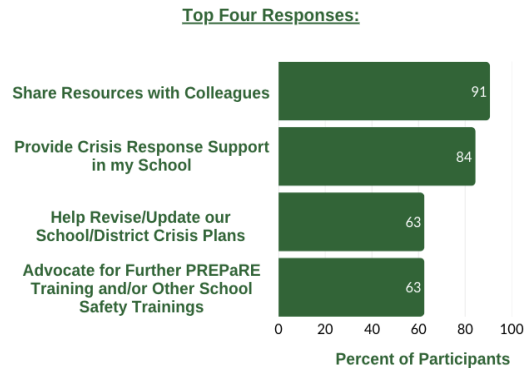
"I am a better professional as a result of this opportunity."

Workshop 2 Participant



Of Training of Trainer Participants attended the initial BIRCh training

What actions do you plan to take as a result of this training?



Tier 2: Regional Approach to Technical Assistance

The TA Center's Tier 2 training and services support those providers, schools, districts, and communities that have targeted needs.

Professional Learning Communities

Data Analyst PLC

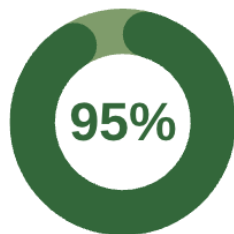
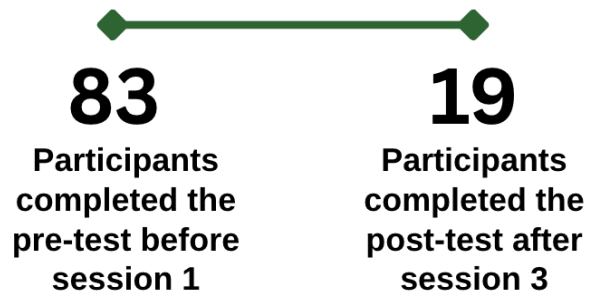
The BIRCh Center's monthly Data Analyst PLC series (March - May 2025) enhanced the capacity of school data leaders to address equity and disproportionality. Participants from various Massachusetts school districts learned practical strategies to strengthen Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 supports using data-driven decision-making.

- **Session 1** focused on strengthening Tier 1 initiatives through data-based decision-making. Participants learned how to develop strategies to strengthen and enhance Tier 1 programming and supports using multiple data sources.
- **Session 2** centered around creating data protocols for Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports across multiple data resources. Participants worked towards establishing a data protocol to identify students in need of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions and resource map available services.
- **Session 3** emphasized progress monitoring and leveraging community partnerships. . Participants learned protocol development for progress monitoring, exit criteria definition, and incorporating community resources into student support services.

Quick Facts: Data Analyst PLC




Participants were asked to complete a pre- and post-test that assessed perceived skill and frequency of data use.



**Of Attendees
Were New to
BIRCh Trainings**

Post-Test Scores Revealed:

 **16% Point Gain** in Ability to Analyze Student Data and Identify Trends

 **18% Point Gain** in Understanding How to Use Progress Monitoring Data to Adjust Tiered Interventions

Several post-test responses indicated plans to apply specific tools and shared resources, like DESSA or fidelity checklists, to support more targeted intervention planning.

Universal Screening PLC

The BIRCh Center facilitated the fourth Universal Behavioral Health Screening PLC series in partnership with Walker Therapeutic and Educational Programs to promote equity through universal behavioral health screening. The five-session series served participants from nine Massachusetts school districts

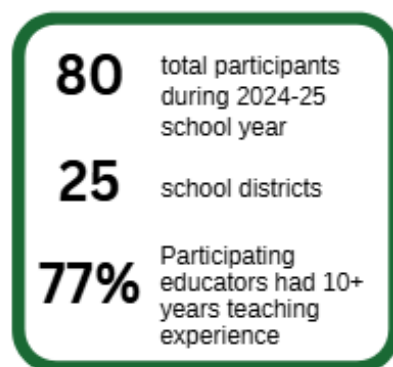
with attendance ranging from **40 participants** initially to **10-21 participants** in subsequent sessions. Attendees were DESE SEL & Mental Health grant recipients, and the PLCs were DESE-supported to help districts build comprehensive school mental health systems and enhance grant implementation.



Teacher Intentionality and Equity for Students (TIES) Teacher Training

Research identifies classroom management self-efficacy as key to preventing teacher burnout, yet adequate training is lacking. TIES enhances culturally responsive classroom management and student-teacher relationships, boosting teacher self-efficacy and self-awareness with diverse populations. The program covers five evidence-based strategies: 1) engaging in relational contact, 2) setting behavioral expectations, 3) creating opportunities to respond, 4) offering behavior-specific praise, and 5) providing corrective feedback. Participants engage in collaborative activities, discussion, and reflection.

Quick Numbers: Teacher Intentionality and Equity for Students (TIES)



Post-Test Scores Revealed:

- ↑ **8.25- Average Point Gain** in culturally responsive classroom management self-efficacy
- ↓ **.484- Average Point Decrease** in Negative Perceptions of Teacher/Student Relationships

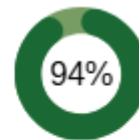
To what extent do teachers perceive the TIES strategies as socially valid?



Felt the Content is very relevant to their instructional practice



Felt very prepared to implement TIES in their classrooms



Felt TIES strategies were very feasible

This year the Center explored hybrid models of service delivery. In a statewide trial over seven weeks, participants completed one of seven pre-recorded, asynchronous modules each week and participated in a virtual Professional Learning Community. Participants used one strategy per week in their classrooms between PLC meetings. **Two separate waves** were held in fall and spring, with **71 educators** completing this training.

In Spring 2025, **nine teachers** from a **two-school district cohort** completed this training and provided feedback on delivery formats for district professional development. Building on promising results from both statewide and district cohorts, the next phase will expand to other local districts while tailoring delivery to their unique contexts.

I'll definitely be looking at these strategies with intentionality as I'm going through "The First Six Weeks Of School."

Workforce Development: BIRCh Fellows Project

The BIRCh Fellows program welcomed its third cohort of **ten Fellows** in the 2024-2025 school year, selected from **78 applicants** from Massachusetts behavioral health graduate training programs. Fellows identify as members of underrepresented groups in the behavioral health workforce, and were master's and doctoral students in school psychology, clinical psychology, counseling, school counseling, and social work from UMass Boston, UMass Amherst,


Northeastern, Simmons, and Springfield. The program provides living stipends, mentors, and networking opportunities to expand the children's behavioral health workforce.

Fellows are encouraged to create resources and infographics on behavioral health topics for educators, caregivers, administrators, and providers. The program has averaged **8-9 resources each year**, covering topics from family-school collaboration to

"My mentor, and it seemed that the program as a whole, did a wonderful job catering to students from marginalized backgrounds. I think for many students like myself, its not that we don't want to have nurturing and fulfilling growth opportunities, it simply that we don't have these connections, and programs like this fill that gap."

"So often I am unsure if I am on the right path in graduate school and it was helpful to receive both validation and recommendations for honing my skills, additional resources, and career guidance."

safety plans to LGBTQ+ youth resources, which are shared on the BIRCh website and give Fellows an entry on their growing resumes.



“One of the positives of this program is that mentors want to be here, and have often lived the same experience that students are currently living.”

The BIRCh Center also partnered with the Massachusetts Association of Black Psychologists (MassABPSi) this past year to host “A Panel Discussion on Providing Culturally Grounded Support for Black Youth Across School, Community, and Clinical Settings” in May 2025.



100%

Mentors and Fellows expressed their interest in serving as future program mentors.

Western Massachusetts Advisory Board

The Advisory Board brought together diverse regional leaders representing school districts, mental and behavioral health providers, early childhood programs, public health coalitions, and state agencies. Members include student services directors, social-emotional learning (SEL) leaders, school-based clinicians, coalition coordinators, behavioral health consultants, and representatives from education collaboratives, the Department of Mental Health, and the Massachusetts Behavioral Health Help Line. The Board met in January and March 2025, with many attending the May in-person convening. Meetings featured BIRCh Center updates, member sharing of local initiatives, and state partner updates. The Board shapes regional efforts to improve student mental health supports at all levels.

Central Massachusetts Advisory Board

The inaugural Central Massachusetts Advisory Board convened in March 2025, drawing **37 registrants** from 10 school districts, four community behavioral health centers, three state agencies (DMH, DCF, Department of Corrections), law enforcement and fire departments, juvenile court, a local hospital, PPAL, and additional mental health agencies. Participants defined the Council's purpose, built a regional cohort for sustainable MTSS systems, and aligned efforts with state priorities. Through structured discussions, members mapped regional challenges—including school attendance, behavioral issues, and mental health access barriers—and identified actionable solutions, establishing a framework for ongoing collaboration.

Tier 3: Localized Approach for Demonstration Districts

In Year 3, the Western Massachusetts Tier 3 coaching initiative expanded to include two new districts—Palmer Public Schools and Hoosac Valley Regional School District—alongside returning partners Westfield and West Springfield Public Schools. These districts are strengthening comprehensive mental health systems and have completed needs assessments and resource mapping to align supports within multi-tiered frameworks. Westfield and West Springfield continue advancing Interconnected Systems Framework implementation through district leadership and community partnerships. Western MA partner districts are supported by the Western MA TA Center Director, who joined the team in November 2024. A certified school psychologist and former public school district administrator, the Western MA TA Center

Director provided districts with over 50 hours of individual coaching and over 40 hours of tailored staff training experiences during the 2024-2025 school year. Sessions included training on supporting students with trauma, developing interventions for school refusal and a day-long Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) planning summit for district schools. Addition of the Central MA TA Center director, also a certified school psychologist and former public school district administrator, has enabled Central Massachusetts expansion, with Old Rochester Regional completing needs assessments and Narragansett Regional engaging in coaching sessions. Following needs assessment and resource mapping, districts will set individual SMART goals with BIRCh support based on district priorities.

2025 Mental Health and Education Impact Forum

The BIRCh Center hosted the **2025 Mental Health and Education Impact Forum** in May at UMass Amherst with the theme "From Data to Impact: Elevating Decision-Making & Measurement-Based Care in Schools." The forum brought together **over 85 professionals** supporting youth mental health, with **two-thirds representing public schools** and the remainder from nonprofit organizations, community agencies, hospitals, state agencies, and higher education. **32 Massachusetts school districts and 24 partner organizations** participated.



Forum attendees listening to BIRCh Co-Director, Sara Whitcomb, PhD, provide opening remarks at the 2025 Mental Health and Impact Forum.

Representative Mindy Domb, House Chair of the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use, and Recovery, opened by highlighting schools' critical role in youth mental health. National experts Dr. Maria Reina Santiago-Rosario and Dr. Elizabeth Connors delivered keynotes on using data for equitable discipline and implementing measurement-based care within MTSS frameworks. A practitioner panel and Massachusetts Child Psychiatry Access Program (MCPAP) representatives shared strategies for cross-agency collaboration and developing Tier 2 behavioral health pathways.

Post-conference surveys revealed that participants gained the most understanding in measurement-based care, with modest improvements in data-informed decision-making and collaboration opportunities. **87% of participants** reported being "likely" or "highly likely" to implement what they learned in their roles. Participants particularly valued the collaborative activities, especially the afternoon stations discussing tiered supports.

Next Steps and Scale Up for 2025-2026

The BIRCh Center will continue integrating state, regional, and local structures to enhance behavioral health service understanding and integration in:

Community Partnerships

- Center equity and elevate youth, family, and community voices across TA Center Tiers
- Support community-behavioral health center and school district partnerships in Western and Central Massachusetts, expanding to Cape Cod
- Complete and disseminate a toolkit for building effective family-centered, culturally-informed, strengths-based school-community partnerships
- Hire Community Partnerships Director to lead professional development efforts on bridging education and mental health systems

Professional Development

- Develop and implement statewide Tier 1 and Tier 2 training and coaching focused on screening, data-based decision making, and crisis response
- Provide training on state and federal funding opportunities through grants and Medicaid reimbursement
- Create and disseminate a 90-minute telebehavioral health MOU training module

Technical Assistance

- Implement regionalized TA approach, including annual regional convenings
- Complete a school district mental health roadmap and toolkit for comprehensive behavioral health system implementation
- Maintain partnerships with demonstration districts, supporting their leadership teams and implementation efforts
- Recruit additional Western and Central Massachusetts districts for coordinated behavioral health and MTSS efforts, with expansion into the Cape region

Translational Research

- Implement new BIRCh Center evaluation plan
- Support student dissertations
- Assess impact of BIRCh Center activities

BIRCh Center Capacity

- Enhance communication structures, including social media presence and strategic dissemination
- Recruit diverse staff to leadership positions
- Hire a Cape Regional TA Center Director
- Hire Community Partnerships Director

Please visit the BIRCh Center website to learn more about

[Technical Assistance Center Services and Assessment Tools](#)

The BIRCh Center

The BIRCh Center advances equitable interconnected behavioral health systems that support children and their caregivers in Massachusetts by **building school districts' capacities** for implementation of *integrated behavioral health, fostering community partnerships, providing pre-service training and professional development, and advancing best practices through translational research.*

More information is available at thebirchcenter.org or contact us at birch.project@umb.edu.

