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Abstract

Students with more severe emotional/behavioral (EB) challenges have many problems in the school environment and subsequently have significant difficulty making adjustments later in adulthood. Coordinated care systems, such as local system of care (SOC) initiatives, were established in response to a call for reform in youth mental health services as research began highlighting the need for improved access and quality of mental and behavioral services for youth. However, even in communities where SOC initiatives are operating well, school involvement is usually marginal. Therefore, the current study aimed to evaluate education's role in one SOC for children and youth with EB challenges in order to systematically evaluate stakeholder perspectives on a SOC collaboration, specifically the Children's Behavioral Health Collaborative (CBHC) in Palm Beach, FL. A mixed methods exploratory sequential design was used to investigate study aims, which included a focus group, key stakeholder interviews, and a survey. Results suggest that collaboration efforts have been evolving, but the quality and quantity of communication and level of partnership varies by stakeholder and between education/schools and community agencies. Stakeholder perspectives on the CBHC were positive, yet stakeholders identified systematic and interpersonal barriers that could be targeted for quality improvement. Recommendations for strengthening collaboration efforts were provided by stakeholders, with results indicating the top two recommendations as follows: secure

additional funding to support existing staff, initiatives, and programming and educate school staff and students on mental and behavioral health. Future directions and implications of results are discussed.