

# **Leadership profiles associated with the implementation of behavioral health evidence-based practices for autism spectrum disorder in schools**

**Nicole A Stadnick, Rosemary D Meza, Jessica Suhrheinrich, Gregory A Aarons, Lauren Brookman-Fraze, Aaron R Lyon, David S Mandell and Jill Locke**

Use of evidence-based practices, such as behavioral treatments, for young people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a public health priority. This is particularly important for the education system that is a key provider of essential services for students with ASD. Leaders, such as school principals, are critical to support implementation of evidence-based practices but little is known about their leadership actions that influence how these practices are implemented. The goals of this study were to: 1) classify the leadership behaviors of school principals involved in implementing evidence-based practices for students with ASD; and 2) understand how these classifications relate to characteristics of the school. Principals, teachers, and classroom support staff completed questionnaires about their background, school leadership, and support for use of evidence-based practices. Three leadership types were identified: 1) Optimal Leadership; 2) Undifferentiated Leadership; and 3) Disengaged Leadership. The majority of the sample was classified in the Optimal Leadership group. The leadership actions demonstrated by this group were related to strong support for using evidence-based practices in schools. Our findings highlight the important role of school principals in facilitating the implementation of evidence-based practices for students with ASD. Our results also suggest the potential helpfulness of specialized leadership training for school principals overseeing changes in service delivery for students with ASD.