

Improving Conditions for Learning

The Roles of School Counselors, School Psychologists & School Social Workers

Schools are designed for learning. There is a direct and obvious correlation between a person's mental health status and his or her ability to learn. According to the Annie E. Casey Kids Count Report and NSCH, in 2012, 16% (197,000) of MISSOURI children between 2-17 were diagnosed by a doctor with autism, developmental delays, depression or anxiety, ADD/ADHD, or behavioral/conduct problems.¹ The need for coordinated and effective mental health services in schools is great, and is reflected in new federal legislation, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA requires states to annually report data on school climate and bullying, as well as focus on specific efforts towards improving school climate, school safety, and the delivery of comprehensive learning supports utilizing a comprehensive team of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP).

This template is designed to help define the roles of these district-employed mental health providers, illustrating best practice. Examples provided are exemplary but not exhaustive. SISP roles are not interchangeable; working as a team is essential. The three outer circles are concise summaries of the unique capabilities and responsibilities of each SISP. The center circle represents shared responsibilities common to all. The purpose of this design is to serve as a spring board for conversation to clarify roles. Each school must define its unique organizational design based on local context, personnel, and skill sets. Role definition is vital to ensure that collaborating adults develop common understanding, work effectively together, and educate others.

The ultimate goal of SISP is to improve the conditions for learning. Providing both prevention and intervention services using a Multi-Tiered System of Support which promotes effective teaching and learning while collaborating with teachers and school staff to ensure that students receive high quality instruction. Simply stated, schools cannot be effective without a healthy and supportive culture. Students cannot be productive learners without viable mental health personnel.

School Counselors are responsible to fully implement the Comprehensive School Counseling Program addressing the academic, social/emotional, and career development of all students through the delivery of school counseling curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive services along with system support activities. They are the first-line school mental health personnel as they deliver Tier 1 services to all students and families in every school as well as refer to School Social Work, School Psychological Services and school based mental health services.

School Psychologists work with students who exhibit significant educational and psychological challenges. School Psychologists focus on assessment, diagnosis, and treatment plans for more complex situations covering the entire spectrum of emotional, functional, and learning barriers, primarily in Tiers 2 and 3. School Psychologists have training in research design, statistics, data analysis and program evaluation. Serving as consultants for educators and parents while supporting high needs students, these providers are a critical source of technical information and guidance for school personnel.

School Social Workers fill a unique niche in the school setting as they provide targeted Tier 2 and 3 mental health services to students with the most notable emotional and behavioral barriers to learning who are either diagnosed with or suspected of having significant mental health concerns. School Social Workers work to strengthen the link between home, school, and community by connecting students, parents, and educators. School social workers' training makes them best suited to serve as the building liaison for any supplemental contracted mental health service providers, as well as legislatively mandated LEA positions such as the Homeless Liaison, Foster Care Liaison, and/or 504 Team Coordinator.

¹<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6031-children-who-have-one-or-more-emotional-behavioral-or-developmental-conditions?loc=27&loct=2#detailed/2/27/true/1021,18/any/12694,12695>

1. Missouri Specialized Instructional Support Personnel's Roles And Responsibilities

