

OVERVIEW

Students' mental and behavioral wellness is directly linked to overall positive student achievement, school climate, high school graduation rates, and the prevention of risky behaviors and disciplinary problems. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) authorizes various funding streams (e.g., Title I, Title II, and Title IV), including funds specifically reserved for schools identified for targeted support and improvement, to support state and district efforts to improve access to coordinated comprehensive school mental health services. Tapping into school psychologists' expertise can be an incredibly powerful tool to develop and implement comprehensive and integrated services that are connected with student learning and school improvement. These highly trained professionals are uniquely positioned in schools to facilitate the development, delivery, and monitoring of prompt, effective, and culturally responsive mental and behavioral health services that are effectively coordinated with needed community services.

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mental and behavioral health services are essential components of comprehensive learning supports, as students' mental and behavioral health underlies *every* aspect of learning. As such, they are most effective when integrated across school improvement efforts and delivered through multitiered systems of support that meet the needs of all students.

Tier 1, universal services are part of a school-wide effort to promote mental and behavioral wellness and prevent mental and behavioral health problems for all students. Key elements of Tier 1 include:

- Universal screening for academic, behavioral, and emotional barriers to learning to ensure early identification and early intervention.
- Infusion of social–emotional learning into the classroom/curriculum.
- Staff development related to identification of mental health concerns and referral processes.
- School-wide positive behavior interventions and supports with a focus on creating a positive school climate.

Tier 2, targeted services address identified or emerging mental and behavioral health problems, prevent risky behaviors, and increase protective factors for students and their families. Examples of evidence-based Tier 2 services include:

- Suicide risk/threat assessment.
- Individual/group counseling and skill building groups.
- Development and monitoring of individual student behavior intervention plans.
- Consultation with teachers and/or families to address mental and behavioral health problems.

Tier 3, intensive services focus on direct and indirect services to address identified mental and behavioral health problems. Examples of evidence-based Tier 3 services include:

Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS) are comprehensive systems of differentiated supports. Data-driven decisions regarding instruction and intervention are provided in increasing intensity (i.e., tiers) based on student need. Tier 1 typically refers to services available to all students. Tier 2 services are available to some students identified as needing some additional services or supports. Tier 3 refers to more intensive services for individuals or small groups.

Every Student Succeeds Act: Comprehensive Mental and Behavioral Health Services

- Direct therapeutic services to all students in need, including individual and group counseling, even in the absence of a clinical diagnosis or identified educational disability.
- Psychological assessment of social, emotional, and behavioral problems.
- Crisis intervention/crisis response.
- Facilitation of collaboration between school professionals and community agencies and other outside mental and behavioral health providers.

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS' EXPERTISE

School psychologists are uniquely positioned in schools to facilitate the development, delivery, and monitoring of prompt, effective, and culturally responsive mental and behavioral health services of prevention and intervention. Some districts mistakenly consider outsourcing all mental health services to community providers as way to save money. This approach runs contrary to both long-term sustainability and availability of services to all students, and their relevance to the learning environment. Just as children are not merely small adults, schools are not simply clinics with blackboards and desks. Community partnerships to improve student mental health are most effective when school psychologists, and other school-employed mental health professionals, are integrally involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of comprehensive school mental health service delivery systems. School psychologists are already part of the school team and are able to provide appropriate, sustainable supports to students, staff, and families that reinforce student well-being *and* learning. School psychologists' broadly focused preparation as academic, mental, and behavioral health service providers, coupled with their engagement in and familiarity with schools' organizational and cultural contexts, equips them to play a primary role in multitiered and responsive school-based mental and behavioral health programs. Specifically, school psychologists:

School psychologists are uniquely positioned in schools to facilitate the development, delivery, and monitoring of prompt, effective, and culturally responsive mental and behavioral health services of prevention and intervention.

- Have expertise in data collection and interpretation. School psychologists can develop and monitor universal mental health screening processes to identify students in need of mental and behavioral health services, or concerns affecting the entire school community.
- Facilitate comprehensive needs assessments to develop strategies to address the mental and behavioral health needs of their school communities.
- Support the implementation of evidence-based efforts to prevent school violence, bullying, and harassment; improve school safety; and foster safe and supportive learning environments.
- Improve quality and effectiveness of family engagement and school community mental health partnerships.
- Provide counseling to individual students and groups of students.
- Provide mental health first aid and professional development related to student mental and behavioral health to school staff.
- Implement suicide prevention policies and practices, including suicide risk and threat assessment.
- Consult with administrators, teachers, and staff to increase knowledge and use of culturally competent practices.
- Facilitate effective communication and collaboration with community agencies/providers to support the availability of the full continuum of mental health services.

RELEVANT RESOURCES

- School Psychologists: Qualified Health Professionals Providing Child and Adolescent Mental and Behavioral Health Services <http://www.nasponline.org/white-papers/qualified-mental-health-professionals>
- Nine Elements of Effective School Community Partnerships www.nasponline.org/community-schools-white-paper
- ESSA Crosswalk <http://www.nasponline.org/essa-crosswalk>