School Psychologists: Supporting Student Mental and Behavioral Health

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What is Mental Health?

• Mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness but also encompasses social, emotional, and behavioral wellness and the ability to cope with life’s challenges.

Mentally healthy children are more successful in school and life.

• Good mental health is critical to children’s success in school and life. Research demonstrates that students who receive social-emotional and mental health support achieve better academically.
• School climate, classroom behavior, on-task learning, and students’ sense of connectedness and well-being all improve as well.
• Mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness but also encompasses social, emotional, and behavioral health and the ability to cope with life’s challenges.

Schools are an ideal place to provide mental health services to children and youth.

• Unfortunately, too many children and youth with mental health problems are not getting the help they need and, when left unmet, mental health problems are linked to costly negative outcomes such as academic and behavior problems, dropping out, and delinquency.
• Schools, however, are ideal settings to provide mental health services. School-based professionals like school psychologists know the students, parents, and other staff.
• The learning environment provides the right context for prevention and intervention. And, importantly, school is where children spend most of their day.

Key Takeaways

• School psychologists are uniquely qualified to develop comprehensive support systems, provide direct and indirect services, and expand access
• Barriers exist, but we can overcome them!
• Current public policy presents significant opportunities for school psychologists to do what we do best—improve outcomes for students

Need for School Mental Health

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• The learning environment provides the right context for prevention and intervention. And, importantly, school is where children spend most of their day.
School mental health services focus on the child within the school setting and on collaboration with families.

- School-based mental health services range from prevention and skills development to intervention and evaluation, referral and collaboration, and consultation and counseling.
- School psychologists are trained to link mental health to learning and behavior in terms of prevention, intervention and outcomes evaluation.
- They team with parents, other school-based mental health professionals, and community service providers to help create a continuum of services that meet the needs of the individual child.

School psychologists provide a continuum of mental health services such as:

- Consultation with school staff and/or parents regarding the social/emotional/behavioral needs of children and youth.
- Consultation with school staff regarding classroom and/or school-wide approaches to behavior and to develop positive behavior supports and interventions.
- Screening, evaluation, identification and referral for children exhibiting emotional disturbances.
- Planning and implementing appropriate academic and other educational supports.
- Conducting functional behavior assessments and/or social skills instruction.

- Measuring progress and improvement both for individuals and also for programs.
- Interventions for students with chronic behavior and emotional needs.
- Small group and/or individual counseling for such issues as social skills, anger control, etc.
- Staff development on topics such as positive behavior supports and intervention, prevention of violence, crisis planning and intervention, etc.
- Resources and information to school staff and/or parents regarding characteristics, intervention, and treatment of disorders.
- Coordination and referral of children and families to community service agencies, related to mental health needs.

Mental Health in Schools?

- Approximately 30% students report being bullied each year.
- Bullying and harassment is associated with increased depression and anxiety for bullies, victims, and bystanders.
- 85% of LGBTQ youth report being bullied
  - 40% reported being physically harassed
  - 19% reported being physically assaulted

Mental Health Services in Schools?

- School based counseling programs improve student mental wellness, behavioral functioning, and academic achievement.
- School mental health programs improve educational outcomes by decreasing absences, discipline referrals and improving test scores.

Current Opportunities

- When Opportunity Knocks, Don’t Let Fear Hold You Back. Open The Door And Embrace the Opportunity That Has Come Forth.
Major Public Policy Issues in Education

- International Competition
  - College/Career Readiness
- Addressing Disparate Discipline Practices
- Halting the School to Prison Pipeline
- Closing Achievement Gaps
- Teacher/principal accountability
- Balance Federal/State/Local role
- School Climate
- School Safety
- Improving behavioral, social-emotional, and mental health

The Every Student Succeeds Act: Opportunities for School Psychology

- Standards, Assessment, and Accountability (oh, my!)
  - States must set challenging standards and performance goals for all students
    - Funds to expand curricula to include arts, music, etc.
  - Replaces AYP with comprehensive accountability model
    - Two measures of student achievement (one must be proficiency on state tests)
      - At least one indicator of school quality
  - REQUIRES meaningful consultation with stakeholders, including SISP in the design of state plans, as well as school improvement plans

School based mental health services provider
- includes a State-licensed or State-certified school counselor, school psychologist, school social worker, or other State licensed or certified mental health professional qualified under State law to provide mental health services to children and adolescents.

'Specialized instructional Support Personnel'
- means (i) school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists; and (ii) other qualified professional personnel, such as school nurses, speech-language pathologists, and school librarians, involved in providing assessment, diagnosis, counseling, educational, therapeutic, and other necessary services (including related services as that term is defined in section 602 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1401)) as part of a comprehensive

Assessment and Accountability for All Students
- As experts in the area of individual assessment, school psychologists understand and can assist others in developing measures that are comprehensive, valid, and reliable indicators of academic skills, social and emotional functioning, and mental and behavioral health.
- School psychologists possess a comprehensive understanding of research and interpreting data in applied settings. School psychologists use these skills to evaluate and apply research as a foundation for determining effective practices at the individual, group, and/or systems levels.
- School psychologists use their expertise in program evaluation and research to help monitor school wide systems that support positive climates for learning and regularly evaluate the breadth and effectiveness of positive interventions and supports.
School Improvement Efforts
• State and district driven improvement plans
• Must utilize needs assessment and examination of resource equity
• Include availability of comprehensive learning supports
• Requires involvement of specialized instructional support personnel

School Climate, School Safety, and Comprehensive Learning Supports
• States must report school climate, bullying and harassment data
  – Assist districts in efforts to reduce incidence
• At least 20% of Title IV Part A funds must be used for at least one activity to improve overall student wellbeing
• School based mental health programs and specialized instructional support services are allowable school improvement strategy

School Psychologists
• School psychologists are trained to design, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive range of interventions for students at risk for academic, social–emotional, or mental and behavioral health concerns.
• School psychologists are uniquely trained to provide a comprehensive range of services that enable schools to implement comprehensive systems of student supports, improve school and district effectiveness, and support improved outcomes for all students.

Improving school climate, school safety, and access to high quality comprehensive learning supports
• School psychologists play a critical role in creating safe and supportive learning environments that promote student learning and are critical members of school crisis prevention and response teams.
• They understand how comprehensive school safety is established when schools combine reasonable physical security measures (e.g., visitor check in procedures, locked doors) with efforts to enhance school climate, improve student engagement, foster respectful and trusting relationships among students and staff, and support overall student success.

School Climate, School Safety, and Comprehensive Learning Supports
• Funds for trauma informed practices, and mental health first aid
• Funds for positive behavior interventions and supports, social emotional learning, conflict resolution, effective problem solving, and appropriate relationship building.
• Funds for job embedded professional development

Current Reactions to Law
Pros (Hopes)
• Scales back intrusive Federal Role
• Prohibits mandate of Common Core or other standards
• Authorizes significant increases in funding for Title I and Title IV (e.g. comprehensive learning supports)
• Comprehensive Accountability System
• Increase focus on importance of specialized instructional support personnel
• Early childhood focus

Cons (Cautions)
• Weakens Federal oversight authority on accountability
• Lowered standards/expectations for certain populations of students
• Lack of district and state capacity
• Fear of unintended consequences
• Pay for Success Programs
• Lack of consequences when states/districts don’t improve outcomes for certain groups of students
Potential Threats-
• Relaxation of credentialing standards for school employed professionals
• States/Districts view other professionals as more valuable/cost-effective
• States and districts continue with the ‘status quo’ rather than meaningfully engage with all stakeholders
• State legislation regarding various ESSA provisions
  – e.g., qualified providers, dyslexia, trauma informed schools, special education eligibility policies and procedures
• Ineffective use of various types of data
• Lack of capacity in delivering comprehensive school psychological services

Current Policies in the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act
• Focus on comprehensive learning supports
• School quality key indicator in accountability
• Use of Title I funds for MTSS, PBIS, and other systems of support
• Dedicated funding to:
  – improve school safety and promote students’ physical and mental health well-being;
  – prevent and reduce substance abuse, school violence, and bullying;
  – strengthen parent and community engagement to ensure safe, healthy, and school environments.
• Provide professional development to school staff
• School employed mental health professionals (e.g. school psychologists) shall be consulted in the development, implementation, and evaluation of any school-community mental health partnership

Making The Case for School Psychologists

School Psychologists: Qualified Providers of Mental and Behavioral Health Services

Role of the school psychologist
• School psychologists are uniquely trained to deliver high quality mental and behavioral health services in the school setting to ensure all students have the support they need to be successful in school, at home, and throughout life
NASP White Paper: School Psychologists Mental and Behavioral Health Role
• School psychologists are qualified MBH providers
• NASP training and practice standards encompass MBH services
• School psychologists are recognized in the ACA and NCLB as qualified providers

Comprehensive School Mental and Behavioral Health Services

Model of School Based Mental Health Services

Prevention and Universal Interventions
• Prevention and wellness promotion
• Universal screening for academic, behavioral, and emotional barriers to learning

Examples
• Consultation with teachers/administrators/families
• MTSS design/implementation
• Social Emotional Learning
• Positive behavior interventions and supports
• Effective discipline policies and practices
• Bullying/Violence Prevention
• Crisis prevention and intervention teams
• Fostering positive relationships among students and staff
Early Identification

- Data analysis
- Staff development/Mental Health First Aid
- Suicide Risk/Threat Assessment
- Protocols for Responding to Bullying
- Systems to report concerns
- Parent/Family Education

Targeted Interventions

Check-In Check Out  Behavior Plans
Group Counseling  Mentoring
Teacher/Family Consultation  Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
Solution focused therapy

Intensive School and Community Supports

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intensive School Interventions</th>
<th>Intensive Community Interventions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual Counseling</td>
<td>Long Term Therapy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Functional Behavioral Assessment</td>
<td>Family Counseling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Education Consideration</td>
<td>Involvement with Social Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualized Behavior Plan</td>
<td>Community Mentoring</td>
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<td>More restrictive environment</td>
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Role of the School Psychologist

- School Psychologists should be the leading mental health experts in schools who are knowledgeable about development in social, affective, and adaptive domains.

Chat With Your Neighbor

Thinking about the schools/districts you serve…

- What, if any services are available?
- Are they meeting the needs of all students?
- Who is providing these services?
- What are areas in need of improvement?
Barriers to School Mental Health Services

Competing Priorities

Stigma/Lack of Understanding

(Lack of) Funding

Shortages

Consequences of Ignoring the Issue

Systemic/Societal
- School to Prison Pipeline
- Homelessness
- Decreased rates of high school graduation/college completion
- Increased Incarceration
- Stagnant progress in reducing school and community violence
- Economic Impact

Individuals
- Decreased achievement
- Poor social skills
- Substance abuse
- Low Self Esteem
- Suicidal Ideation
- Increased engagement in risky behaviors
- Suspension/Expulsion
- Decreased earnings
School Mental Health: Who is Influencing the Conversation

- School administrators
- School psychologists/counselors/social workers
- Community agencies
- Private practitioners (Marriage and Family Therapists, Clinical Psychologists etc.)
- Juvenile Justice
- Gun Rights supporters
- The Media
- Celebrities

How do Others Perceive School Psychologists?

Time for a Chat....
What are the three most important things you want people to know about the value of school psychologists as mental and behavioral health providers?

(2 minutes)

Do decision makers know how you help:

- Meet the needs of students at-risk for school failure?
- Ensure safe school environments?
- Improve school-family-community collaboration?
- Contribute to improved school climate?
- Lower or prevent barriers to learning?
- Facilitate data-based decision making at the individual/classroom/building/district levels?
- Provide guidance on realigning services to enhance academic progress?
Show Them the Data
• Educational Outcome Data
  ○ State/District/Building
• Demographic Risk Data
  ○ Kids Count http://datacenter.kidscount.org/
• Research or Survey Data
  ○ YRBSS http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/index.htm
  ○ School Climate
  ○ Scholarly Research
• Office of Civil Rights Data http://ocrdata.ed.gov/

Improving Student Outcomes
• School psychologists support healthy successful students
  – School psychologists work with students and their families to support students’ social, emotional, and behavioral health, and research has shown that students who receive this type of support achieve better academically in school (Fleming et al., 2005; Greenberg et al., 2003; Welsh, Parke, Widaman, & O’Neil, 2001; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004).

• School psychologists help create safe, positive school climates
  – School psychologists work with teachers and administrators to create classroom environments and school climates that are conducive to learning, and research has shown that improving school climate is associated with increases in student performance in reading, writing, and mathematics, both in low- and high-performing schools (Hanson, Austin, & Lee-Bayha, 2004; Spier, Cai, & Osher, 2007; Spier, Cai, Osher, & Kendziera, 2007).

• School psychologists work to strengthen family-school partnerships
  – School psychologists work with students and their families to identify and address learning and behavior problems that interfere with school success, and school-based behavioral consultation has been shown to yield positive results such as remediating academic and behavior problems for children and reducing referrals for psycho-educational assessments (MacLeod, Jones, Somer, & Havey, 2001).

1. Offer a continuum of school and community mental-health supports
• An increasing number of schools are providing mental-health services through a multi-tiered system of supports, or MTSS. At one end of this continuum is the universal promotion of mental health and wellness.
• Providing universal wellness promotion serves to mitigate more intensive problems while at the same time improving overall achievement. At the other end is coordinated, individualized, and intensive school- and community-based mental-health treatment designed for those students who develop mental disorders
• For students with severe mental illness, it is critical to have seamless access to community-based treatment resources

• How can we maximize mental health supports for students?

2. Improve school-community collaboration to provide integrated and coordinated mental-health care
   - Disconnects between school- and community-based mental-health providers create some of the biggest problems in mental-health care.
   - Lack of effective communication leads to confusion, contention, fractured decision-making and implementation, and missed opportunities. These disconnects are caused in equal parts by structural differences.
   - Establish a leadership team composed of school and community mental-health professionals, conducting an assessment of needs and existing resources, clarifying roles and responsibilities, providing professional development, and making time for regular problem-solving and evaluation.

3. Broaden access to school mental-health supports beyond special education.
   - Special education services are essential for students who have learning and emotional disabilities that prevent them from accessing the general education curriculum. But many students who need mental-health supports do not meet the criteria for having a “disability.”
   - When schools provide mental-health supports within an MTSS, all students have access to services, while special education is focused on those students with disabilities requiring intensive and specially designed instruction.

4. Empower families to manage the myriad decisions and resources they need to meet their child's mental-health needs.
   - Parents should be the ultimate arbiters of their child’s care and well-being. And they are often the primary, if not the only, bridge between school and community services.
   - Respecting the parent’s role while also conveying critical information about needed services is a delicate but critical responsibility for school and community professionals.
   - Improving our mental-health system requires a concerted effort among all of us. In addition to reframing our approach, increasing human and financial resources is essential.

Pair and Share
What are 2 specific actions you can take to expand your role in comprehensive mental and behavioral health service delivery?

Questions?
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