

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 ability to learn and the status of their mental health. The Center for Disease Control estimates that 5% of children between the ages of 4 and 17 demonstrate mental health issues. That translates to 45,000 Missouri school aged children. The need for coordinated and effective mental health services in schools is great!

This template is designed to help define the roles of these mental health providers in an ideal situation. Examples provided are exemplary but not exhaustive. Roles are not interchangeable. The three outer circles are concise summaries of the unique capabilities and responsibilities of each group. The center circle represents shared responsibilities common to all three groups. 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 and job definitions are vital if collaborating adults are to develop common understanding, work effectively together and educate others. Working as a team is essential.

The ultimate goal of school mental health providers is to improve the conditions for learning. Providing both prevention and intervention services at all three levels of the Response To Intervention (RTI) model 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 dispositions.

Professional School Counselors hold responsibility to fully implement their Comprehensive Guidance Program addressing the academic, personal/social, and career development of all students through the delivery of guidance curriculum, individual planning, and responsive services along with system support activities. They are the primary school mental health providers as they deliver services to all students and families in every school as well as serve as the point of contact for Social Work and School Psychological Services. School Counselors are engaged in every facet of school and serve as the first line in each tier of interventions and consultations.

School Psychologists work with students with advanced 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. 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 Psychologists typically serve as consultants for multiple schools.

School Social Workers are an increasingly common and critical component to student support services. School Social Workers fill a unique niche in the school setting as they conduct psycho-social evaluations and provide mental health services for a targeted number of students with more notable emotional and behavior barriers to learning, typically Tiers 2 and 3 interventions. School Social Workers work with student, parents and educators providing consultation and interventions concerning home, school and community factors to improve student's school functioning.