



Position Statement on School Psychologists as Mental and Behavioral Health Service Providers

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (12/10/2015) and the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act (SB 7026; 3/9/2018), state education officials and local districts have been afforded opportunity and funding to increase access to school-based mental health services for Florida's youth. Neither ESSA nor SB 7026 outline specific service delivery systems or practice; however, both provide great flexibility to state and local education agencies to use school-specific funding (e.g., Title I, Title II, Title IV, and mental health allocations) to develop school-based plans that best meet their individual mission and goals. In order to make the most of available funds to improve school safety and mental health, there is a logical and research precedent for hiring additional well-trained mental health professionals and to capitalize on the mental health professionals who are already working in our schools.

School psychologists in particular are uniquely trained and qualified to help schools and districts use available funding to implement preventative and targeted evidence-based interventions to improve student outcomes. Psychologists support their schools by designing, implementing, and monitoring comprehensive student support services to address the academic, behavioral, social-emotional and mental health needs of students. As site-based practitioners, they deliver a wide-range of psychological services within a multi-tiered, culturally responsive framework at the school, classroom, and individual level. They are knowledgeable in systems-level consultation and can provide training to their colleagues related to educational policies and initiatives. With their consultation training, school psychologists serve as valuable members of school-based problem-solving teams, including those responsible for maintaining school safety or identifying and supporting at-risk students. The following are some of the advantages of using school psychologists to meet the behavioral and mental health needs of students:

- School psychologists work directly with school personnel and are thus accessible to students for immediate crisis response, including threat assessments, and/or mental health support. Their familiarity with school expectations and procedures facilitates seamless service delivery that addresses academic, behavioral, and social-emotional success.
- Most children identified as having mental health problems receive part or all of their mental health support in school, making schools the de facto mental health system for children (Jacob & Coustasse, 2008). School psychologists provide services that integrate mental health needs with educational priorities at the student and systems levels, and can further increase supports for students by involving parents and community stakeholders.
 - *At the student level:* School psychologists provide individual and group-level behavioral and mental health services, evaluate students' learning needs, and develop individualized plans to support academic, behavioral, and social-emotional functioning.
 - *At the systems level:* School psychologists receive specialized training in data analysis, research, and program evaluation, which makes them valuable consultants and sources of accessible and affordable professional development for school personnel. School psychologists use this training to plan, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of school-wide initiatives such as Positive Behavior Supports and anti-bullying programs.

They are also qualified to assist in the development of district policies and to provide the necessary staff development or training needed to implement such protocols. These policies include, but are not limited to, suicide prevention training, threat or risk assessment procedures, social emotional learning curriculum, and mental health supports in schools. School psychologists may also assist district-level personnel establish and maintain partnerships with community-based service providers.

- *At the family and community level:* School psychologists are accessible to parents and caregivers and can help to increase consistency in students' lives by sharing resources and strategies with the families of their students. They provide valuable information about service providers in their communities so children and their parents can seek supports beyond the school setting. School-based practitioners may also initiate referrals based individual student needs and facilitate ongoing home-school-community collaborations to foster wrap-around services.

The NASP [Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services](#) further delineates reasonable service delivery across 10 domains and have been established standards for school psychologists for more than 30 years. Several domains reflect practices that address mental health and behavioral health needs across schools and districts. Therefore, school districts are highly encouraged to consult and utilize school psychologists to help meet the mental health and behavior needs of students.

To meet the growing mental health needs of students, school psychologists are most effective when they provide systematic supports that include preventative measures. Universal screening practices are widely used for prevention and early intervention of academic difficulties (Elliot, Huai, & Roach, 2007), but they are also essential for identifying mental health needs (Dowdy et al., 2010). By moving beyond reactive interventions to also include preventative measures, schools can address many of their students' behavior and mental health problems before they reach crisis levels (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Durlak et al., 2011).

References:

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