



NASP Position Statement on Interagency Collaboration to Support the Mental Health Needs of Children and Families

The National Association of School Psychologists is committed to the development of partnerships between schools and other community agencies to build coordinated, comprehensive systems to meet the educational and mental health needs of children and their families. Children's mental health is strongly related to their academic performance (Adelman & Taylor, 2006a). Nevertheless, children with mental health problems are often unable to receive the services that they need due to limited resources, limited numbers of mental health providers, the vast numbers of children needing services, and the lack of coordination between agencies (Fantuzzo, McWayne, & Bulotsky, 2003; U.S. Public Health Service, 2000). Collaboration among agencies is essential in order to support the academic achievement and healthy social-emotional development of children (Adelman & Taylor, 2006a, 2006b).

Through effective collaborative efforts, schools and communities can design a continuum of services that include prevention, early intervention, and treatment of severe and chronic social and emotional problems. These coordinated and comprehensive services are cost-effective and can improve service delivery, avoid duplication, and provide for a continuum of service delivery options (Flaherty et al., 1998). In addition, collaborative efforts improve working relationships between schools and community mental health, juvenile justice, and other child-serving agencies (Holden et al., 2003). Streamlined collaborative services result in improved outcomes for children, their families, and their communities including increased academic performance, improved attendance, increased engagement in academic activities, fewer disruptions to the learning environment, reduced social welfare and unemployment, and reduced need for emergency and adult services (Adelman & Taylor, 2006a, 2006b).

Building Partnerships a Key Role of the School Psychologist

Schools and medical care facilities are the two most common providers of mental health services to children and youth in the U.S. (Foster et al., 2005). Given this lead role in the provision of mental health services, schools represent the most logical focal point for coordinated service delivery. School psychologists are the *primary* mental health service providers in many schools and are uniquely trained to help bridge the gap between schools and community agencies. School psychologists can act as the liaisons between schools and community-based programming or social service agencies (NASP, 2003). With training in psychology, education, and mental health, school psychologists can function as change agents who use systems consultation and promotion of public policies to support the education and mental health needs of children. School psychologists facilitate communication and collaboration with

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students and school personnel, community professionals, agencies, families, and schools, which result in positive academic, behavioral, and mental health outcomes for children/youth. These collaborative actions build on the role of the school psychologist within the school. For example, within their own schools, school psychologists design prevention programs, consult with teachers and school administrators to assist in developing strategies that reduce the impact of social and behavioral difficulties, and provide direct services through individual and group counseling as well as case management. Together, these different actions help to create a continuum of care of students.

School Psychologists as Facilitators of Collaboration:

School psychologists can foster collaborative relationships that facilitate the creation of coordinated mental health services by engaging in the following activities:

- Working with community agencies and parents to identify needs and available resources in the community and at the school.
- Developing a working relationship with practitioners in other child-serving community agencies and with individual who provide mental health services to children and their families.
- Attending and actively participating in interagency teams already established in the community.
- Developing a common vision for collaborative outcomes with community agency practitioners and formulating a common philosophy of service delivery.
- Helping agencies understand each community agency's role and how each agency can expand services to address gaps or eliminate duplication that may exist.
- Working with community agencies to develop interagency agreements and procedures for managing issues of confidentiality, professional ethics, and referral between agencies.
- Developing clearly defined goals for the collaborative effort such as increased student attendance, decreased suspensions, and improved academic performance.
- Providing cross-agency training by inviting agency personnel to participate in professional development programs focused on implementing complimentary services and effective collaboration.
- Inviting community agency personnel to present information to the school staff regarding the agencies' services and accessing their resources.

- Providing information to parents, school administrators, other agencies, and policy makers about the training of school psychologists, and the mental health services that they provide to children and their families.
- Working with professional associations and other community agencies to promote local and state policies and legislation that promote the mental health of children.

Collaboration Support

NASP has a vested interest in fostering professional collaboration and in promoting the benefits of school-based services and programs, both in the workplace and in the policy arena. NASP will provide assistance and support to school psychologists in obtaining the resources necessary to effectively facilitate collaborative efforts. To further encourage collaborative partnerships, NASP requests other child-serving providers and organizations to join in efforts to establish working relationships that enhance service delivery and to address children's needs. The goal of collaborative relationships among schools, agencies and parents is to create a comprehensive and integrated system to support the mental health needs of children.

Summary

School psychologists can play a lead role in developing broad community supports that address the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of children and their families. Building partnerships will take an ongoing commitment to develop communication, work together to plan services and educational programming, and overcome barriers with diverse agencies. However, the continued development of a systemic network for children and families that can address a greater level of need and reduce the strain on any one institution should be a goal of school psychology practitioners.

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