THE BIG PICTURE

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides significant opportunity to increase access to comprehensive school psychological services to help improve student and school outcomes. In particular, ESSA expands emphasis on and funding for efforts to meet students’ mental and behavioral health needs. As states and local districts work to improve school-based mental health services, it is vital that decision makers understand both the importance of providing comprehensive, integrated services and the critical role that school psychologists can play in effective design and implementation. The alternative risks an increase in fragmented services and a dysfunctional disconnect between services and learning. 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 that are effectively coordinated with needed community services. These services involve universal, preventive measures as well as targeted service delivery for students with significant social, emotional, and behavioral needs.

MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

ESSA acknowledges the direct link between students’ mental and behavioral wellness and overall positive student achievement, school climate, high school graduation rates, and the prevention of risky behaviors and disciplinary incidents. Importantly, and consistent with NASP standards for training and practice, ESSA identifies school psychologists as school-based mental health services providers who are qualified to provide the full range of comprehensive school psychological services. ESSA provides great flexibility for states and districts and does not mandate the implementation of a specific service delivery system or require the use of specific practices. As such, it is imperative that school psychologists are actively engaged in the development and implementation of school mental and behavioral health service delivery systems to ensure alignment with best practices and the mission of schools. 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:

- Implement multitiered systems of support (MTSS), positive behavior interventions and support, or other school-wide tiered models to address the social–emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs of all students.
- Administer universal mental and behavioral screening and provide early intervention for at-risk students.
- Increase access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services, including wellness promotion.
- Improve quality and effectiveness of family engagement and school community mental health partnerships.
- Provide mental health first aid and other professional development and training for relevant school staff to:
  - Facilitate early identification and referral of students who may be in need of mental health supports.
  - Implement suicide prevention policies and practices, including suicide risk and threat assessment.
  - Support the implementation of trauma informed practices.
  - Increase knowledge of culturally competent practices.
  - Support evidence-based efforts to prevent school violence, bullying, and harassment; improve school safety; and foster safe and supportive learning environments.

School-based mental health services providers include state-licensed or state-certified school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, or other state licensed or certified mental health professionals qualified under state law to provide mental health services to children and adolescents.
KEY MESSAGES

School psychologists have unique training and skills to assist schools in implementing and delivering high-quality, comprehensive services to address the social, emotional, and behavioral needs of students. We can help schools and districts use funding available to implement both preventive and targeted interventions to improve student outcomes. As states and districts begin to develop service delivery models, we can work with administrators and other decision makers to ensure that we are utilized in a way that supports our comprehensive role, that services are provided within a MTSS framework, and that all students have access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services delivered by qualified providers.

- MTSS is an evidence-based framework for effectively integrating services to address the academic achievement, social–emotional, mental and behavioral health needs of students.
- Schools are a natural setting for mental health prevention and treatment services. School psychologists can help schools conduct comprehensive needs assessments to develop strategies to address the mental and behavioral health needs of their school communities.
- With 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.
- School psychologists:
  - provide mental and behavioral health services for individual students and groups of students;
  - implement wellness promotion programs and social–emotional learning;
  - empower parents and teachers to identify and refer students who may be in need of mental health supports;
  - provide professional development related to student mental and behavioral health to school staff.
- School psychologists can facilitate effective collaboration with community agencies/providers to support the availability of the full continuum of mental health services.
- 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.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Engaging as early as possible with the key stakeholders most relevant to designing school-based mental and behavioral health services is critical. Although specifics in each district and state will vary, these stakeholders are likely to include:

- State chief school officers
- State/local school boards
- State governors and legislators
- District superintendent

Details and contact information for stakeholder groups can be found at www.nasponline.org/essa/key-contacts.pdf

RELEVANT RESOURCES

Resources related to the Every Student Succeeds Act and school psychological services are available on the NASP website (http://www.nasponline.org/essa). These resources include:

- Topic-specific ESSA fact sheets
- ESSA/MTSS/NASP Practice Model Crosswalk
- Resources and guidance from the U.S. Department of Education
- Information about specific funding sources in ESSA
- NASP Practice Model Implementation Guide
- NASP position statements and white paper on mental and behavioral health services