



## Oklahoma School Psychological Association Position Statement: The Importance of School Mental Health Services

The Oklahoma School Psychological Association (OSPA) advocates for the provision of coordinated, comprehensive, culturally competent, and effective mental health services in the school setting which include prevention and early intervention services as well as therapeutic interventions. These services should emphasize competence enhancement, prevention of mental illness, education, early intervention, and coordination of intensive interventions to adequately address student mental health needs.

OSPA recognizes that it is cost-effective and efficacious to deliver mental health services in the schools to children, adolescents, families, and communities. Consequently, OSPA supports increased federal, state, local, and private funding for mental health services in the schools. OSPA also supports school reform that eliminates barriers to students' learning and includes school psychological services as an integral component of effective schools. Culturally competent school psychological services are sensitive to the individual needs of students, their families, and their communities. OSPA encourages school psychologists to actively participate in interagency teams that are established in their community, and work to develop new interagency collaborations with community agencies.

The effect of mental health on school success and achievement is well-documented, with factors such as healthy self-regulation, emotional competence, and positive relationships being critical components related to school success (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). Many students are unable to benefit fully from educational experiences when they are living with adversities such as poverty, violence, or substance abuse, and these may lead to disengagement from school. Other students struggle to succeed in schools that do not fully accommodate their cultural and linguistic differences. Comprehensive, coordinated, and culturally competent mental health services are necessary to the success of these students.

### Addressing Mental Health Promotion Within the Context of Schools

Schools are the logical point of entry for services to promote the mental health and social and emotional competence of students. For nearly half of children with emotional disorders who receive any intervention, schools are the sole providers. Moreover, schools frequently are the primary providers of mental wellness promotion efforts for children. Culturally competent school-based and school linked services can be designed to promote mentally healthy children using a range of service options, including universal promotion of social and emotional competence, psychological wellness, productive activities, and healthy relationships; early screening and identification of students with psychological disorders; and coordination of intervention efforts in

other settings (e.g., community, home) for children and youth experiencing significant deficits in mental functioning and/or pathology.

## Appropriate Pupil Services

Pupil services professionals typically include school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers, school health professionals, and other qualified professionals. Together, these professionals provide assessment, direct services, functional analyses, educational remediation, instruction in social and emotional strategies, general curriculum support, program coordination, in-service training, and other necessary services as part of a comprehensive program to meet student mental health needs.

Effective organization of these specialists results in highly functional trans-disciplinary teams working with students, families, special and general education teachers, and community agency personnel to create appropriate intervention options for all students.

## Interagency Collaboration as a Framework for Service Provision

The provision of truly comprehensive and effective mental health services is dependent on collaboration among agencies. However, the lack of coordination among agencies has actually interfered with children receiving appropriate services (Fantuzzo, McWayne, & Bulotsky, 2003). Coordinated and comprehensive services can be cost-effective, improve service delivery, avoid duplication, and provide for a continuum of service options (Flaherty, Weist, & Warner, 1996). Moreover, collaborative efforts improve working relationships among schools and community mental health, juvenile justice, and other child-serving agencies (Holden, Santiago, & Manteuffel, 2003). Streamlined collaborative services result in improved outcomes for children, their families, and their communities and result in increased positive academic outcomes, fewer disruptions to the learning environment, reduced social welfare and unemployment, and reduced need for emergency and adult services (Adelman & Taylor, 2006).

## Role of School Psychologists

School psychologists are uniquely qualified to provide comprehensive, cost-effective, mental health services. They are trained to integrate the knowledge and skill base of psychology with their training in education, learning, child development, and educational systems. School psychological services include but are not limited to consultation; the formulation of behavioral intervention plans and behavior management; provision of direct mental health services for individual and small groups; assessment; development, implementation, and evaluation of prevention and intervention programs; crisis intervention; and referral processes. School psychologists are also uniquely trained to bridge the gap between schools and community agencies because their training emphasizes culturally-competent practice, prevention science, mental health services, and ecological-systems theories. They facilitate communication and collaboration with community agencies and related professionals, school personnel, and families. As change facilitators, they engage in systems consultation and the promotion of public policies to support the education and mental health of children.

## Summary

Universal mental health promotion in schools, early identification and intervention, and interagency collaboration represent a comprehensive mental health service system that enhances students' academic, behavioral, and interpersonal outcomes. School psychologists play critical roles in all these activities through direct service, assessment, and consultation.

## References

- Adelman, H. S., & Taylor, L. (2006). *The implementation guide to student learning supports in the classroom and schoolwide: New directions for addressing barriers to learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Fantuzzo, J., McWayne, C., & Bulotsky, R. (2003). Forging strategic partnerships to advance mental health science and practice for vulnerable children. *School Psychology Review*, 32, 17–37.
- Flaherty, L. T., Weist, M. D., & Warner, B. S. (1996). School-based mental health services in the United States: History, current models and needs. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 32, 341–352.
- Holden, E. W., Santiago, R. L., & Manteuffel, B. A. (2003). Systems of care demonstration projects: Innovation, evaluation, and sustainability. In A. J. Pumariega, & N. C. Winters (Eds.), *The handbook of child and adolescent systems of care: The new community psychiatry* (pp. 432–458). San Francisco: JosseyBass.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (1999). *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health.

Adopted by the OSPA Executive Board January, 2014 from the National Association of School Psychology Position Paper: National Association of School Psychologists. (2008). *The importance of school mental health services (Position Statement)*. Bethesda, MD: Author.