

Ensuring High-Quality, Comprehensive, and Integrated Specialized Instructional Support Services

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) supports policies and practices that enhance the education and development of all students through the organized delivery of comprehensive and integrated specialized instructional support services and the important role of school psychologists in delivering them. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) recognizes the importance of comprehensive and integrated services, and it specifically names school psychologists by title as qualified mental health professionals who provide mental health services to children and adolescents and as one of the specialized instructional support personnel (SISP). School psychologists are well positioned to deliver a range of comprehensive and integrated ESSA services, such as school/district assessment and accountability, school improvement efforts targeted supports, and innovations to improve school climate, school safety, and access to high-quality comprehensive learning supports (ESSA, 2015). NASP further promotes multitiered systems of supports (MTSS) as an educational service delivery model to deliver specialized instructional support services. MTSS is an efficient model of service delivery that allows for tiered supports and flexible delivery of academic, behavioral, and social–emotional supports along a continuum for all students (Tier 1), some students (Tier 2), and individual students (Tier 3) who require intensive individualized supports, using data to flexibly make decisions across tiers (NASP, 2016a; Skalski, Minke, Rossen, Cowan, Kelly, Armistead, & Smith, 2015).

School psychologists are best positioned to provide integrated comprehensive services as SISP within MTSS models of service delivery when they are employed directly by the school districts they serve. During times of economic crisis and personnel shortages, school districts may consider alternatives to employing their own personnel (including school psychologists), such as contracting with external agencies for specific services or eliminating SISP. However, NASP maintains that school psychologists employed by school districts and housed within them are best positioned to deliver and facilitate comprehensive and integrated student supports. School psychologists employed as school district employees are best positioned to provide cost-effective services including prevention, early intervention, and wellness activities aligned with MTSS that eliminate the need for more costly services. They apply a systemic and organizational perspective to problems; are sufficiently familiar with the students, staff, legal requirements, culture, and policies of the school system to facilitate communication and defuse potentially dangerous or adversarial situations; and (d) provide accessible, culturally competent tiered mental and behavioral health services to children and families. School psychologists provide a wide range of comprehensive services to students, staff, and families, including building and maintaining positive school climates and relationships, ensuring school safety, crisis prevention, intervention and rapid response, and promoting access to high-quality comprehensive learning supports as major activities described within ESSA (NASP, 2016b) that would not be feasibly purchased via private contracts.

DEFINITION OF SPECIALIZED INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Comprehensive and integrated specialized instructional support services are the educational, behavioral, and health-related services provided in an organized, systematic, and collaborative manner to address all aspects of student need in order to ensure that students fully benefit from their school experience. School psychologists, as SISP, understand that comprehensive learning supports are initiated prior to the onset of academic or behavior concerns in a prevention-oriented fashion. Therefore, the purposes of the services are often the prevention of the emergence of learning and/or behavior concerns. Prevention is best achieved through an ecological service delivery model that uses data-driven decision making within an MTSS, and effective collaboration among SISP (e.g., school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers, as well as other qualified personnel; ESSA, 2015) to maximize learning and social growth for all students.

Although student support services are initiated prior to the onset of concerns, the Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) also mandates comprehensive services by requiring a continuum of services for children with disabilities. This is best accomplished when educational specialists from multidisciplinary perspectives work with one another in schools to enhance the competence of individual students and develop the capacity of systems to address student needs along a continuum of supports. Given that school psychologists' training incorporates individual competence enhancement, building system capacity, and tiered data-based decision making consistent with MTSS as SISP (NASP, 2010, 2016a; Ysseldyke et al., 2006), they are critical members of a comprehensive team focused on prevention and early response to academic, behavioral, and social-emotional student needs. NASP promotes school psychological services that "are provided in a coordinated, organized fashion and are delivered in a manner that ensures the provision of a comprehensive and seamless continuum of services" (NASP, 2010, p 9; Organizational Principle 1).

OBJECTIVES OF SPECIALIZED INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

The following are critical elements in the design and delivery of specialized instructional support services.

- Effective implementers recognize that learning takes place within environmental and social contexts, and they take steps to assist schools in reaching student learning objectives across a continuum of support aligned with MTSS.
- Comprehensive student services should be developed from identified needs of all students and integrated directly into the contexts in which they function.
- Student needs are identified through universal screening of academic, behavioral, and social-emotional functioning that is embedded within an MTSS, and should be monitored with increasing frequency and precision as student needs dictate to verify that the services address the student's area of concern.
- Effective programs of service within the school that best meet student needs are delivered through an MTSS framework by multidisciplinary teams that ensure culturally competent practice, and they include a focus on developmental, preventive, and remedial activities that facilitate the educational process for all students.
- Comprehensive student services should include potential contributions from all stakeholders, including students, parents, school psychologists and other SISP, teachers, and administrators. School personnel recognize that not all services can be provided in the school and therefore include effective linkages and consultation with various community resources when needed through a collaborative and coordinated process.

- School psychologists and other SISP engage in ongoing accountability and program evaluation efforts that incorporate the input of all school and community stakeholders. These efforts are crucial in both the development of effective comprehensive services and ensuring continuing community support.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

School psychologists are uniquely qualified to participate in the design, provision, and evaluation of comprehensive school-based academic, behavioral, and social–emotional supports aligned with MTSS. They are trained in human learning, development of behavioral health and cognitive skills, academic intervention, use of assessment data to make decisions, and ecological systems-based service delivery and consultation, which are important skills for effective SISP. Thus, in addition to directly intervening with children and youth, school psychologists can: (a) develop and provide system-wide prevention activities delivered within an MTSS; (b) interpret data for program planning; (c) develop and monitor program services; (d) provide system-wide, classroom, and individual case consultation; (e) develop crisis prevention and response protocols; and (f) assist in the important coordination of these potentially overlapping services. In addition, school psychologists are uniquely trained in assessment and data-based decision making. Therefore, school psychologists can support decision making at the individual, group, classroom, grade, school, and district levels to improve instructional and behavioral health services provided in schools aligned with MTSS and the school-related SISP functions outlined within ESSA and IDEA.

SUMMARY

The effective delivery of comprehensive and integrated student services is essential to education and is supported by the role of school psychologists as specialized instructional support personnel employed by schools. Meeting diverse student needs requires a school-based multidisciplinary team approach that utilizes open communication, mutual trust and respect, and ongoing collaboration of professionals, families, students, community members, and other stakeholders. An integrated and well-coordinated comprehensive MTSS model of service delivery is aligned with activities described within ESSA and allows schools the opportunity to serve the behavioral, academic, and social–emotional needs of all students.

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