

**The Role of Student Services Personnel in Florida Schools:
Creating Safe Schools through School-Based Mental Health Supports**

The Florida Association of Student Services Administrators (FASSA) represents administrators of Student Services professionals within Florida's 67 school districts. A critical role of Florida's Student Services administrators is to lead and supervise the professionals within our schools who are uniquely qualified and credentialed to provide school-based mental health services (i.e., School Counselors, School Psychologists and School Social Workers). With research indicating that 20% of the nation's youth have mental health concerns and schools are the most accessible location for services, Student Services personnel have the responsibility to provide school-based mental health intervention services to over 535,000 of the state's children and youth and preventative mental health and school safety activities to *all* of Florida's students.

The tragic and unfortunate incidences of violence in our nation's schools have brought attention to the need for a comprehensive and unified plan to address school safety among superintendents, school administrators, legislators, law enforcement, and mental health professionals. Furthermore, the President's Executive Orders of January 2013 speak to the importance of school-based mental health in preventing school violence. Sadly, our school-based mental health professionals are too often used for crisis *response* as opposed to crisis *prevention*. District and school-based safety models that encompass behavioral and mental health prevention activities in conjunction with other school safety initiatives are far more effective in reducing school violence.

The following school-based mental health activities can (and should) be provided by Florida's School Counselors, School Psychologists and School Social Workers:

- Universal screenings for behavioral and mental health issues
- Early identification of risk factors that lead to mental health concerns
- Training for school staff and parents on risk factors that lead to mental health concerns
- Improving school climate and ensuring a process for students to report potentially harmful behaviors
- Threat assessments of students who are in danger of harming others
- Suicide assessments
- Individual and group counseling
- Social skills training
- Bullying Prevention
- Evidenced-based practices to improve student engagement
- School-wide Positive Behavior Supports
- Anger management training
- Evaluating students who may need specialized instruction as a result of behavioral and mental health concerns
- Linking those students (and families) who may need further supports to community agencies
- Implementing peer facilitated interventions such as conflict resolution and peer counseling

The following is needed action by district superintendents, district and school-based administrators, and legislators:

- Increase students' access to school-based mental health by increasing (or at the very least, maintaining) current Student Services personnel within school districts
- Ensure that the professional time of School Counselors, School Psychologists and School Social Workers is spent in activities that enhance mental health and educational outcomes
- Address district organizational structures to ensure that Student Services personnel can be aligned in working on mental health and behavioral issues
- Increase alternatives to suspension and Positive Behavior Supports so that students have the opportunity to be actively engaged in instruction
- Support legislation that provides funding for additional Student Services personnel to implement anti-bullying and violence prevention programs in every public school
- Ensure that each school and district has an active Mental Health Service Delivery Plan that is tiered for levels of support needed by students
- Ensure that each school and district has a multi-disciplinary Threat Assessment Team which includes school administration, a School Psychologist, School Counselor, School Social Worker and representation from law enforcement when needed
- Support professional development activities for Student Services personnel to increase access to research-based strategies and interventions that address student mental health
- Incorporate behavioral and mental health supports into School Improvement Plans and ensure that resources are allocated to provide these supports

For more information on how Florida's Student Services professionals support school safety, prevent school violence, and enhance the mental health and academic outcomes of Florida students, contact a board member of the Florida Association of Student Services Administrators at: www.fassaonline.org

Providing Advocacy, Leadership and Support
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