

A Framework for Planning and Implementing School-Based Mental Health Services

An Introduction to School-Based Mental Health Services

Historically, most related services, including mental health services, have been provided to students with disabilities separate of the educational process and setting. Such services, often provided in separate clinical settings, by personnel not associated with the child's education, have proved to be costly and unsuccessful in improving behavior and learning outcomes within educational settings. Further, the detachment of such related services affords little or no opportunity for impact upon the overall climate of the child's school or the ability of educators or student peers to be a part of the school support structure. The Hawaii State Department of Education is one of a few states to provide services which will result in improved behavior and learning outcomes on the part of all students. The description below follows the flowchart presented in figure 1.

Framework Components

1. Goal/Vision or Purpose

When planning and implementing school-based mental health services it is important to have a vision or mission statement that will drive activities with the development process. The vision should provide wording which is helpful to the planning team, as well as "all" persons interacting with the supportive environment of the school/community. Most goal or vision statements include an outcome statement ("all students will experience improved behavior and academic learning outcomes within a positive and supportive school climate") and a process statement (how the school/community will proceed to achieve the described outcome).

2. Approach

The recommended approach toward planning and implementing School-Based Mental Health Services is a school-wide or whole school approach, where all units and/or persons within the school/community have a role or function in supporting students with mental health and other behavior/learning needs. (This approach should be reflected in the vision). The approach should further describe how the school will proceed and how each member of the school will participate in the planning and implementation of the new school-based mental health support structure.

3. Initiative

This "Brief" will specifically address the School-Based Mental Health initiative which is one of several initiatives within the Hawaii State Department of Education focused upon supporting children with special needs to benefit from their educational experience. Other such initiatives include Comprehensive System of Student Support (CSSS), Effective Behavior Supports (EBS), and Standards-Based Instruction (SBI).

4. Coordination (school level)

Efforts to plan and implement a School-Based Mental Health framework at the school level require attention and coordination of one or more persons. For some schools this person may be the Student Services Coordinator (SSC); other administrative or support personnel may serve in this role. It is critical that one or more school level persons are in the role of coordinating the planning the implementation process.

5. Planning and Implementation Team (school level)

Planning a school-wide approach to School-Based Mental Services requires the participation of all instructional and support roles within the school setting; it should also include community service providers and family members of children with special needs. One way to ensure such participation is to implement a school-wide student support framework. Representation on this team should include school support personnel (counselors, special educators, others), instructional staff, administrative staff (teachers, vice-principal, others), school/community linkage persons (mental health providers, supporting community agencies and parents), and other school persons. This team could provide governance and implementation support to the conduct and monitoring of a School-Based Mental Health program.

6. Levels of Intervention

When implementing a school-wide approach toward the provision of mental health services and supports, it is necessary to plan a range of interventions or activities across different levels of the school environment. The following levels of intervention are provided as a guide for planning and implementing school-wide, school-based mental health services:

School-wide Interventions

Includes those interventions and activities which involve all personnel and students within the school environment ñ such activities might be planned to support a positive climate of learning and pride within the school, or to assist overall readiness of students to participate in productive learning. Sample activities include: (1) morning homeroom "ready to learn" activities where the focus is upon ensuring that all students are mentally, emotionally, and physically ready to participate in learning activities; (2) forming cohort support teams around course scheduling and study times, where all students support each other through structured activities; and, (3) mentor advising/support activities where all school personnel are involved in activities that promote healthy interactions and learning.

Specialized Support Interventions

Includes structured activities that are planned specifically for those students who are experiencing intensive mental health, socio-emotional or other issues which interfere with their attendance, participation, and learning within the school setting. Such services and activities are typically coordinated and/or provided by school counselors, contracted mental health providers, school social workers, or other school/community agencies to

impact upon mental health needs and encourage productive participation and learning within the school environment. It is important that specialized support interventions are well coordinated and integrated with all other support, as well as instructional activities, providing the student with a seamless array of supports focused upon positive participation and learning within the school environment. Sample activities may include: (1) school counselor developed support and follow-up networks for individual students experiencing specific difficulties ñ such networks may include direct consultation sessions with students and teachers (individual or small group), support check-in follow-up at various intervals of the school day, and other mentor/support relationship building; (2) "readiness to participate in school and learn" courses/sessions for students who need special support to make it to and through the school day; and, (3) structured and coordinated counseling and support sessions with individual students.

Classroom/Instructional Supports

Includes structured supports and activities planned for the classroom, which may be for all students or specifically focused upon a student experiencing mental health or other behavioral difficulties. Such activities should be planned within the school support team and might include: (1) in-service training or demonstration of differentiated learning strategies to benefit the participation and learning of all (especially those with diverse learning needs) students in classroom instruction; (2) coordinated (with other supports being received by the student and the family) classroom activities and supports for individual students or small groups of students provided during the instructional period; and, (3) specialized assistance by counselors or educational assistants within the classroom environment.

Family/Community Supports

Includes structured and coordinated (with the overall school-based mental health support plan) educationally related mental health services offered to the student and their family members. It is important that such activities and services are planned and implemented in support of the overall plan for improved participation and learning within the school. Such activities should be planned and monitored by the school support team and might include: (1) family/student counseling or agency advocate planning around school readiness activities; (2) maintenance of school attendance and participation within check-in and follow-up support activities; and, (3) social worker input and participation within school site supports that might assist a seamless network of school-community-home supports and services.