

Collaborative School Mental Health:



Connecting School Mental Health Professionals

School mental health supports have been promoted to address the unmet mental health needs of young people in this country. These supports can include programs, policies, and practices that encompass a continuum of interventions including mental health education, mental health promotion, assessment, problem prevention, early intervention, treatment, and recovery¹.

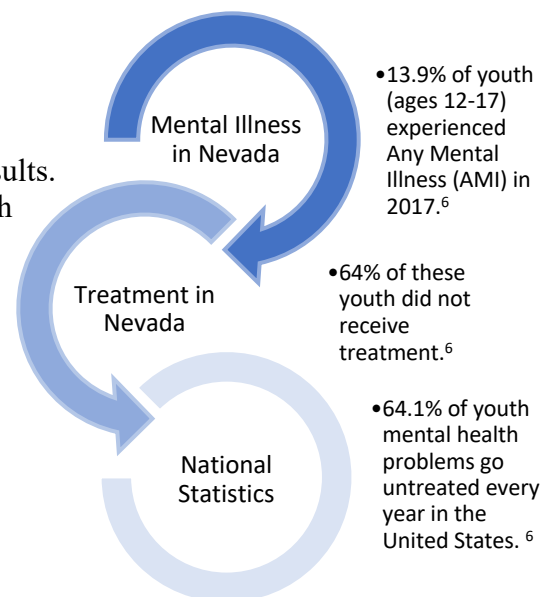
Who are School Mental Health Professionals?

“School mental health supports encompass social–emotional learning, mental wellness, resilience, and positive connections between students and adults.”²

School-employed professionals like school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers are the most universal school mental health professionals across the United States. In Nevada, other school-based professionals could include: school nurses, behavior interventionists, safe school professionals, and Communities in Schools professionals. As each school mental health professional has unique and overlapping areas of expertise, these professionals must work together to achieve the best outcomes for students. The guiding national professional organizations, National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)³, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA)⁴, and School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA)⁵ list collaboration as a required activity for the profession.

School mental health efforts are interdisciplinary by nature.

Effective collaboration involves working together in ways that valued results. Increasing effective collaboration among school mental health professionals can address barriers to student learning by increasing access to services. As seen in the graphic to the right, an alarming percent of pervasive mental illnesses in adolescents go untreated. By increasing collaboration and using the strengths of all three professions, this number may decrease.



The need for collaboration within school mental health is often ignored, which perpetuates challenges in supporting students.

Collaboration between school mental health professionals could capitalize on the strengths and unique aspects of each profession to build a united mental health program.

Unique Aspects of School Counseling

- Student Advocacy
- Orientation and transition services
- Cumulative records and scheduling
- Individual student academic planning and goal setting
- Counseling & guidance support for all students
- School counseling classroom lessons based on student success standards

Unique Aspects of School Psychology

- Assess and interpret results for special education and services.
- Conduct Functional Behavior Assessments for behavior plans.
- Utilize evidence-based interventions, screeners for identifying students, and tools for monitoring student progress.
- Use of school-wide data regarding academics, behavior, and social-emotional functioning with a systems-level focus.

Unique Aspects of School Social Work

- Home-School-Community Liaison
- Home visits and truancy intervention
- Social Emotional & Behavioral Assessment
- Direct services (individual or group therapeutic services, social and emotional learning)
- Treatment of emotional disorders
- Professional Case Management
- Consultation for Behavior Intervention Plans

Overlap Between School Mental Health Professionals

- Knowledge of child development and support mental health across grades
- Background knowledge in crisis prevention and intervention
- Consult with teachers, administrators, staff, and parents on supporting students
- Trained in multi-tiered systems of support and facilitating policies and practices for effective learning environments (i.e. RTI & PBIS)
- Coordinate school-wide practices
- Offer professional development for teachers, parents, and staff

Areas for Collaboration

Through this overlap between the professions and the unique aspects each profession brings to the table, there are several potential areas for collaboration. First, on an individual level, school counselors can help identify students who would benefit from **psychological assessments** and **screenings** offered by the school psychologist. In the same way, school psychologists could include school counselors in **problem-solving team meetings** with teachers and administrators. This would allow collaboration among professions in order to offer the very best recommendations and resources to the student and family.

Second, on a school community level, school counselors and school psychologists could **share data** and **responsibilities** regarding school-wide interventions. On a smaller level, they could work together to **develop, lead, and evaluate psycho-educational interventions** for specific groups of students. They could also utilize their cumulative understanding of learning theories to **provide suggestions** to teachers and staff on behavior and classroom management strategies.

Third, on an administrative level, school counselors and school psychologists could share in the inevitable burden of **paperwork** that is a necessity within each occupation. They could include each other in the **planning meetings** for upcoming curriculum, and even **attend professional development** seminars and events with the other profession. Accompanying one another to state conventions could be a great opportunity to strengthen the relationship between professionals and understand the strengths and resources that each profession brings to the table.

Barriers to Collaboration

While collaboration in school mental health is considered best practice, there are many challenges associated with collaborating that often deter professionals. Such challenges need to be identified and addressed to aid school counselors and school psychologists in collaboration. One large hurdle in Nevada is the lack of school mental health professionals. As of April 2020, there were 951 school counselors, 239 school psychologists, and 375 school social workers employed in k-12 schools in Nevada.⁷ See below for possible challenges and possible solutions.⁸

Challenge #1: Limited Time

- Solutions:
- Schedule recurring, protected time
- Have goal-oriented and solutions-focused meeting

Challenge #2: Different Perspectives

- Solutions:
- Take time in the beginning for team building. This builds trust and allows opportunities for perspective taking
- Encourage differences to enhance services for students

Challenge #3: Turf Protectiveness

- Solutions
- Create clear and distinct boundaries around roles and responsibilities
- Develop and utilize common language around practices

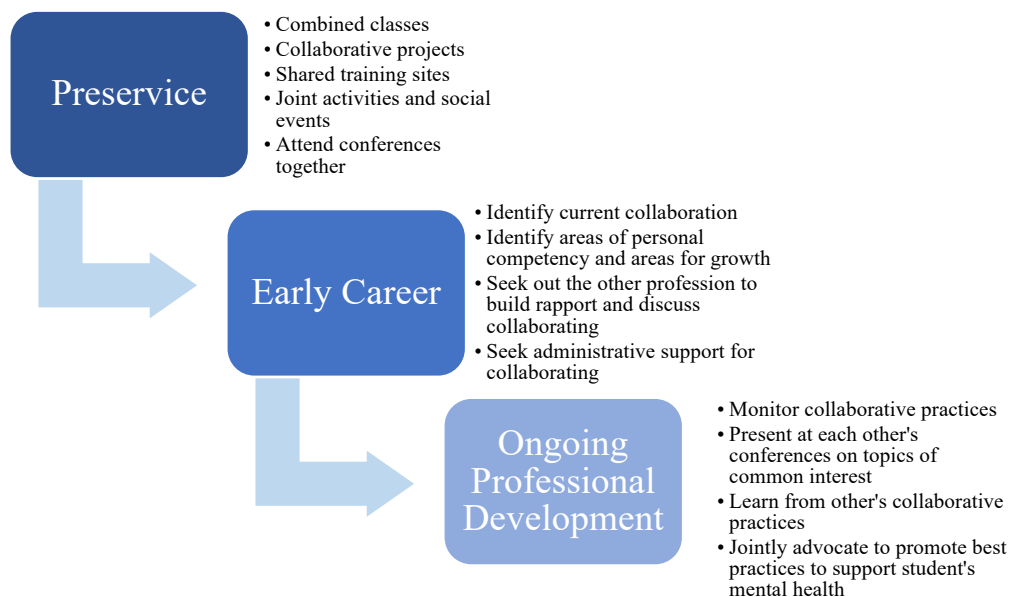
Challenge #4: Lack of Administrative Support

- Solutions:
- Collaboration falls under a required activity in the NEPF for all three school mental health professionals and meeting documentation can be provided as supporting evidence
- Review positive outcomes for collaboration with administrators

Challenge #5: Unclear Expectations and Lack of Collaboration Training

- Solutions:
- Identify current practices and set goals for collaboration
- Collect necessary data to monitor effectiveness
- Attend professional development opportunities and learn from others' approach to collaboration

Encouraging Collaboration Across Career Stages



Resources

Role of a School Counselor

<https://schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/ee8b2e1b-d021-4575-982c-c84402cb2cd2/Role-Statement.pdf>

Role of a School Psychologist

<https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/who-are-school-psychologists>

Role of a School Social Worker

<https://www.sswaa.org/school-social-work>

Framework for Safe and Respectful School Environments

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/systems-level-prevention/a-framework-for-safe-and-successful-schools>

Nevada 211

<https://www.nevada211.org/mental-health-services/>

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5. School Social Work Association of America. (2013). *National School Social Work Practice Model*. Sswaa. <https://www.sswaa.org/copy-of-school-social-worker-evalua-1>
6. Mental Health America. (2020). *Ranking the States*. https://www.mhanational.org/issues/ranking-states#youth_data
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8. Bender, S., & Lee, K (2015). *Uniting with School Counselors to Enhance School Mental Health* Paper presented at the National Association of School Psychologists annual convention, Orlando, FL.