



Position Statement on Student Services Personnel, School Safety and Student Mental Health

School Counselors, School Psychologists, and School Social Workers are frontline behavioral and mental health providers who collaborate to deliver direct student services to support the social/emotional development and academic achievement of all children and adolescents. Collectively, these student support personnel function as part of school-based mental health teams to:

- Implement universal, targeted, and individual supports within a multi-tiered framework;
- Deliver prevention, intervention, and postvention services as part of comprehensive school safety plans;
- Promote physical and psychological well-being by fostering positive school and social climates;
- Assist administrators and school resource officers during risk and/or threat scenarios; and
- Facilitate “next steps” in crisis situations, restore a sense of normalcy, and foster posttraumatic growth after emergencies occur.

Lowering the professional to student ratio, hiring more School Counselors, School Psychologists, and School Social Workers, and empowering these professionals to use their specialized training and skills to carry out their roles and functions within the schools can vastly improve the delivery of mental services in schools.

1. High ratios of students to support staff undermine and hinder each professional’s ability to meet the existing and growing needs of students, families, and schools. One-out-of-five students will experience a behavioral or mental health concern warranting intervention¹. However, without access to counseling services within the school many students will go without treatment.

Sufficient numbers of appropriately trained professionals are necessary to meet the mental health needs of school communities.	School Counselor	School Psychologist	School Social Worker
➤ Earned at least a master’s degree with specialized training in organization/ operation of schools, child development, counseling and mental health assessment/intervention.	✓	✓	✓
➤ Nationally recommended personnel to student ratio	1:250	1:500-700	1:250
➤ Current ratios in Florida as of 2016 (FLDOE)	1:485	1:2,022	1:2,526

2. Funds from the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act (Senate Bill 7026) can be appropriated to hire more certified school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers to expand the mental health services in our schools. Furthermore, hiring more school psychologists and school social workers enables districts to increase Medicaid billing which can help cover the costs of providing mental health services in the schools.

School Counselors, School Psychologists and School Social Workers provide a broad continuum of mental health services, including prevention and tiered intervention strategies, and collaboration with both school-based and community mental health providers to enhance student success and to prevent crises.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Collaborate with common stakeholders - students, parents/caregivers, teachers, school resource officers, and communities. ➤ Assist in early identification and management of risk and crisis referrals, including threat assessments. ➤ Provide preventative education, skill-building, and counseling for students during times of transition,

separation, heightened stress, and critical need.

- Work with students individually, in groups, and across classrooms to develop and to generalize healthy coping skills (e.g., self-regulation, anger management, and social problem-solving).
- Use appropriate responses and a variety of intervention strategies to meet the needs of individuals, groups, or school community before, during, and after any crisis.

3. School Counselors, School Psychologists, and School Social Workers are far too frequently assigned roles and responsibilities that do not take advantage of their specialized training. These professionals' unique skills sets are overlooked or underutilized, which interferes with their ability to provide direct support/intervention to students, to enhance instructional practices, to facilitate home-school collaborations, to improve school-wide policies, and to coordinate needed services with community-based partners.

School Counselors, School Psychologists and School Social Workers act as systems change agents in collaboration with the school leadership teams to ensure a safe, supportive, and respectful school climates that promote the social-emotional, academic development, and success of all students.

- Help design, guide and evaluate school-wide prevention frameworks such as positive behavior supports and anti-bullying campaigns.
- Ensure that schools have appropriate processes for referring and reporting students at-risk for or in need of academic, behavioral, or mental health support services.
- Foster student success in schools through increased attendance, feelings of acceptance, decreased discipline referrals, increased engagement, and academic enhancement.
- Promote cultural competence and foster school climates that recognize, support, and celebrate all student populations.

This document was developed collaboratively by the Florida School Counselor Association (FSCA), the Florida Association of School Psychologists (FASP), and the Florida Association of School Social Workers (FASSW), together representing approximately 8,300 professionals across the state.

The **Florida School Counselor Association** (<https://www.fla-schoolcounselor.org>) expands the image and influence of school counselors through advocacy, leadership, collaboration, and system change at the state level. FSCA empowers school counselors with the knowledge, skills, connections, and resources to promote equity, access to high-quality education and overall success in school for all students in the realms of academics, social and emotional and career needs. The mission of FSCA is to represent school counselors and to promote professionalism and ethical practices among Florida school counselors.

The **Florida Association of School Psychologists** (<http://fasp.org>) seeks to further public knowledge of the field of school psychology and to empower practitioners across the state. FASP promotes ongoing professional development, state- and national-level public policy advocacy efforts, and collaboration among educational stakeholders to improve students' learning, behavior, and mental health. The mission of FASP is to advocate for the mental health and educational development of Florida's children, youth, and families and to advance the profession of school psychology.

The **Florida Association of School Social Workers** (<https://www.fassw.org>) empowers school social workers serving children in many unique and diverse roles in a variety of educational settings, while advocating for the educational and social welfare of children. FASSW strives to provide a vehicle for social policy change and be an advocate for the profession through community and legislative efforts. The mission of the FASSW is to promote the profession of school social work and enhance the professional growth and development of school social workers throughout the State of Florida in order to more effectively meet the needs of all children.

¹ United States Surgeon General's Report on Children's Mental Health, 1999.