Core Feature 1:

Well-Prepared Educators and Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP)

What does it mean for educators and specialized instructional support personnel (SISP) to be well prepared?

For decades, it meant that they are knowledgeable about their content and skilled in delivery of that content. Today, it means much more. We know that success in school and life demand much more than academic preparation. Consequently, our expectations for school staff have expanded.

School staff are not mental health providers, but they must be knowledgeable about and invested in the mental health of their students. In co-creating this Dialogue Guide on well-prepared educators, we first look at the cross-sector agreements among national experts. Then we explore those issues with decision-makers, practitioners and families at state, local and organizational levels.

Across both groups, staffing, professional development and capacity building are the priority issues. While there is broad agreement with the Core Features, the array of stakeholders involved in co-creating this Dialogue Guide identified issues that are embedded in these common concerns. Consider how you may use these Dialogue Starters in your setting or in your organization. Collectively, we have a role in bringing attention to the need for comprehensive systems of school-based mental health.

The source document, _**Advancing Comprehensive School Mental Health Systems: Guidance from the Field**_, summarizes the expert panel conversations on well-prepared educators by coming to the following critical agreements:

- A Comprehensive School Mental Health (CSMH) system is built on the foundation of a full complement of school and district professionals, including SISP who are well trained to support the mental health (MH) needs of students in the school setting.

- Administrators and educators are often on the front lines of promoting student MH and addressing MH concerns and must be adequately trained and supported to do so.

- Equipping educators with social and emotional skills and MH literacy will prepare them to best support student MH and create a healthier workforce.

- Specialized instructional support teams (e.g., school counselors, social workers and school psychologists, and other qualified professional personnel, such as school nurses and occupational therapists) must be adequately staffed to provide assessment, diagnosis, counseling, and educational, therapeutic and other necessary services to support student needs.

The conversation among stakeholders offered a practice-based view and focused on five themes:

- Educator preparation, ongoing professional development, and capacity building within the system

- Essential staffing

- Collaboration across school and community providers

- Pipeline issues and shortages

- Pandemic recovery and system redesign

This Dialogue Guide incorporates both sources. The guide offers *Reaction Questions* and *Application Questions* from which you can choose Dialogue Starters that will allow you to take these conversations into your work.

Resources

Resources to inform this content are available at:

- Shortage of School Psychologists
- National Education Association: Building a Diverse Workforce
- National Alliance of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel: Student Health and Wellbeing and more
- Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at AIR: Address Educator Shortages
- Dialogue Guide Response Strategies

Practice Issue 1

Educator Preparation, Ongoing Professional Development and Capacity Building Within the System

Reaction Questions:

1. In your view, what is the connection between educator preparation programs and the daily challenges of delivering instruction in school environments that have social, emotional, cultural and equity challenges?

   • What do your colleagues say about their preparation to understand MH needs?

2. Using a *1-10 Scale* (10 high), how effectively are we developing both the academic and the social/emotional/behavioral capacity of educators? Explain the insights behind your rating.

   • What advances this work?

   • What stands in the way?

3. What will it take to build capacity to address MH needs of students?

   • Is school staff training enough? Why or why not?

   • How might we build new capacity to address challenges?

4. Stakeholders identify **school culture** as an important element in building and sustaining a focus on school MH. Using the *Four Quadrants*, place each of the following in a quadrant that shows the extent to which each is playing a role in developing a supportive school culture. Tell us why you placed it there.

   • The role of school staff

   • The role of families

   • The role of community providers

   • The role of the local school board

Application Questions:

1. From your perspective, should induction programs begin to address school MH needs for faculty? Using the *Ifs, Ands and Buts* response strategies, give us your impression.

2. If professional development is intended to develop the will and the skill to address behavior, what would you look for (*Response Strategy: My Look Fors*) in high-quality professional development?

3. In your view, how could data around truancy, discipline and suspension provide insights about school MH approaches?

4. Using the iceberg visual in the response strategy *What Lies Beneath*, what is above the surface in systems that fail to connect data on truancy, discipline and suspension to the well-being of all students? What is beneath the surface?

5. How might school and community providers identify and coalesce around key data?

6. Is there a role for families as the connectors between school and community providers? How can family needs help align planning across groups?

Practice Issue 2

Essential Staffing

Reaction Questions:

1. From your perspective, what positions are "essential" in a CSMH system?

2. What would you look for (*Response Strategy: My Look Fors*) as indicators that these positions work together in a system that is comprehensive?

3. In your experience, in what ways does school leadership impact the use and effectiveness of essential staff positions?

4. In far too many places, the leadership vision for a CSMH system is lacking. Using the iceberg visual in the response strategy *What Lies Beneath*, what is above the surface that fails to develop the leadership vision for **comprehensive** systems? What is beneath the surface?

Application Questions:

1. Think about staffing across school and community providers as a *Give and Get* proposition.

   As you imagine the participation of community providers:

   • What do community providers "give" to help build more system capacity?

   • What do community providers "get" from joint staffing?

2. As you imagine the participation of school-based providers:

   • What do the array of school-based providers "give" to help build more system capacity?

   • What do schools get from joint staffing?

3. In your view, what is the role of clinical services in a full program of MH support?

   • What is your "look for" (*Response Strategy: My Look Fors*) in the collaboration across school and community providers?

4. Using a *1-10 Scale* (10 high), how important is it for school staff and community providers to use strength-based approaches? Explain the beliefs behind your rating.

Application Questions (State and Local Levels):

1. Using a *1-10 Scale* (10 high), to what extent is the connection between school and community providers a priority in training within and across agencies? Explain the insights behind your rating.

    • Are there models that might be exemplars? How can you find out?

2. Focus on the importance of connecting school and community providers as a priority for current and new initiatives. Now, using the *Four Quadrants*, place that need in one of the quadrants. Share your placement and your reasons.

    • When connecting related initiatives is a priority, what specific expectations should be included in funding opportunities?

Practice Issue 3

Collaboration Across School and Community Providers

Reaction Questions:

1. Think about the various stakeholders in school mental health (SMH). Who do you identify as potential SMH partners?

2. What are your "look fors" (*Response Strategy: My Look Fors*) in a true partnership?

3. In your experience, what will it take for school-based and community providers to become true partners in developing CSMH systems?

    • What do community providers need to know about delivering service in school environments?

    • What do school-based staff need to know about clinical interventions, services beyond the school day and services beyond the school environment?

Application Questions:

1. Using a *1-10 Scale* (10 high), to what extent do we consistently identify the potential partners who could contribute to our work? Explain the insights behind your rating.

2. Resources on CSMH systems often identify the need for equitable participation of stakeholders in developing systems that effectively serve needs.

    • In your view, what is the difference between equal participation and equitable participation?

3. In your view, is there a difference between participation and engagement? Describe each.

Application Questions (State Level):

1. Using the *Four Quadrants*, place the efforts to address equity and engagement in the credentialing process for school and community providers.

   - What promising preservice preparation programs are currently forming/operating?

Application Questions (Local Level):

1. If you have operating examples of collaboration around SMH …

   - What practices are in place?

   - What successes have you realized?

   - How might you move these examples toward a more CSMH system?

2. If you do not have operating examples of collaboration around SMH …

   - What stands in the way?

   - What help do you need to build this collaboration?

Practice Issue 4

Pipeline Issues and Shortages

Reaction Questions:

1. Many school-based roles, including educators, counselors, school nurses and school psychologists, have significant national shortages.

   - Using a *1-10 Scale* (10 high), to what extent is this issue addressed in CSMH planning? Explain the insights behind your rating.

   - What is the potential impact of these shortages on a CSMH system we envision?

2. Many community-based roles, including caseworkers and clinicians, have significant national shortages.

   - Using a *1-10 Scale* (10 high), to what extent is this issue addressed in CSMH planning? Explain the insights behind your rating.

   - What is the potential impact of these shortages on the CSMH system we envision?

Application Questions:

1. What do we know about the status of the current staffing and the supply of qualified personnel?

   • What do we need to know?

   • What practices are organizations and agencies putting in place to cope with shortages?

2. Which roles that we identify as essential are experiencing shortages:

   • In our state?

   • In our area?

3. What does the data around shortages mean for our planning a CSMH system?

4. What does the data around shortages mean for our understanding about the professional development needs for both school and community staff?

Application Questions (State Level):

1. Across agencies, what actions are underway to identify and communicate critical shortages?

2. Across agencies, what actions are underway to address critical shortages?

3. To what extent are agencies developing recommendations to address shortages in the near term?

4. What long-term initiatives for capacity building are under consideration?

   • By the state agencies?

   • By the professional organizations representing these disciplines?

Practice Issue 5

Pandemic Recovery and System Redesign

Reaction Questions:

1. In your view, how has the pandemic illustrated the critical connection between school and MH?

2. From your perspective, what systemic issues in education, in MH and in their relationship have the pandemic exposed?

3. In your experience, what creative and promising approaches have been introduced during the pandemic?

4. Following the pandemic, we talk about building back better. **If you** could influence action on one issue in system redesign:

   • Which position would you influence?

   • What would you encourage/discourage?

Application Questions:

1. We know that the work of many stakeholders must come together to address the many situations that have developed during the pandemic.

   • As school-based providers, what do we know about MH efforts that have supported students and families during the pandemic?

   • As community-based providers, what do we know about the school-based efforts that were in place during the pandemic?

2. What have we learned from the initial use of virtual and telehealth platforms that might offer new opportunities for collaboration between families and providers?

3. Every system has asked families to play an important role during the pandemic.

   • What are your "look fors" (*Response Strategy: My Look Fors*) in systems that want to include families meaningfully?

   • What observations tell you that families are not included meaningfully?

4. Using a *1-10 Scale* (10 high), how important is it to involve families as we redesign school-community collaboration. Explain the insights behind your rating.

5. What is your staff saying about collaboration?

   • How are you checking for understanding and agreement?

   • How are you reinforcing the collaboration and addressing concerns?

6. What are the privacy issues that could complicate collaboration and how are we addressing them?

Application Questions (State Level):

1. We know that the work of many agencies must come together at local and school levels. As a state agency, what is our role in bringing people together in shared work?

2. What attention are we giving to the privacy issues that respect individual rights **and** enable collaboration?

3. Using a *1-10 Scale* (10 high), to what extent do we map the current work in our own and related agencies as we plan new initiatives? Explain the insights behind your rating.

   • What factors advance and constrain our practice around mapping as a part of planning?

4. How are we messaging the importance of collaboration?

   • Do we consistently express our collaborative role in communications with the field?

- Do we intentionally model collaboration in high-value events and venues?

- Do we fund collaboration?

  ◦ Where are the examples?

  ◦ What have we learned?

5. As we build back better, are we prioritizing the connections across school and community providers in new funding. Using the *Four Quadrants*, place the expectation for funding to connect school and community providers as a priority for current and new initiatives.

   - What does your placement tell you about what needs to be done?