

Student Support Services Task Force Summary Report

2006-2007

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provide for students' educational achievement and student safety,

and to enhance student physical, emotional, and social well-being

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Given the charge of the 2005 Minnesota Legislature, the Minnesota Department of Education called together a task force of student support services personnel - school psychologists, school nurses, school counselors, school social workers and school chemical health personnel. The Student Services Coalition for Effective Education, a long-standing network of the professional organizations of the respective student services disciplines, appointed members to represent these disciplines.

The student support services professionals, having worked with students throughout the state, brought their rich knowledge and experiences to several facilitated, focused working meetings in the winter of 2006-2007. The Task Force, to meet on the parameters of the legislation, presented below, began by establishing a vision statement and then went on to draft recommendations, complete with a focus on the needs and method for determining how needs could be addressed both through personnel and funding.

Minnesota Session Laws 2005, 1st Special Session

CHAPTER 5 ARTICLE 10

Sec. 4. [LICENSED STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES.]

Subdivision 1. [ACCESS TO SERVICES.] School districts and the Department of Education shall work to provide for students' educational achievement, to provide for student safety, and to enhance student physical, emotional, and social well-being by providing access to licensed student support services, such as licensed school nurses, licensed school counselors, licensed school social workers, licensed alcohol and drug abuse counselors, and licensed school psychologists.

Subd. 2. [FUNDING.] School districts and the Department of Education shall explore opportunities for obtaining additional funds to improve students' access to needed licensed student support services including, at least, medical assistance reimbursements, local collaborative time study funds, federal funds, public health funds, and specifically designated funds.

Subd. 3. [IMPROVING ACCESS.] School districts and the Department of Education must consider nationally recommended licensed staff-to-student ratios, work loads, and best practices when working to improve student access to needed licensed student support services.

<http://ros.leg.mn/data/revisor/slaws/2005/1/index.php>

Task Force Charge:

1. To provide access to student support services so that students:
 - achieve academically
 - are safe
 - have enhanced well-being
2. Explore funding opportunities
3. Consider national ratios/workload
4. Best practices for accessing Student Support Services

The Vision

Minnesota students will have access to a full continuum of student support services to strengthen academic achievement, physical, emotional, social well-being, and safety.

Student support services consist of fully staffed and funded licensed school counselors, licensed school social workers, licensed school psychologists, licensed school nurses, and licensed school chemical health specialists.

These student support professionals provide evidenced based interventions that serve the student, family, teachers, school community; and facilitate connections with community resources.

Task Force Objectives

1. Examine current data regarding access to licensed student support services.
2. Examine current data regarding student services/mental health services available in Minnesota schools.

3. Review key models from other state's services programs.
4. Explore funding opportunities to improved access to licensed student support services.
5. Name the sources for evidenced based practices in student services.
6. Outline best practices in student services that are essential in a Minnesota model of student support services.

Background

The National Association of Pupil Services Organization (NAPSO)[\[1\]](#) states that the services provided by student support personnel address barriers to learning and assist students in being successful in school. These vital services are focused on prevention and intervention activities that promote effective classroom teaching and learning. Student support services personnel work collaboratively with teachers, administrators and other school staff to ensure that students receive high quality instruction that is responsive to the diverse array of students' learning and developmental needs and challenges.

Further, the responsibilities of student support services personnel are defined by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) [\[2\]](#) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)[\[3\]](#):

ESEA states "The term "pupil services personnel" means school counselors, school social workers, school psychologists, and other qualified professional personnel involved in providing assessment, diagnosis, counseling, educational, therapeutic, and other necessary services (including related services as that term is defined as defined in IDEA as part of a comprehensive program to meet student needs.
20 U.S.C. § 7801 (36) (A)

IDEA defines "related services" as the developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education, and includes ...psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, including therapeutic recreation, early identification and assessment of disabilities in children, counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling, ...and medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes. Related services also include school health services and school nurse services, social work services in schools, and parent counseling and training.
34 CFR § 300.34 (a)

As stated, the teams of student support services work to provide comprehensive, integrated services that address a wide range of student needs, especially as they

intersect with a child's ability to learn, grow and develop. Student services personnel know children and families well and develop relationships that grow from year-to-year. Student supports services know the resources of their communities well and connect children and families to the services that are a good match with their cultural perspective, knowledge and need.

Minnesota Student Support Services Staffing/Workload Discussion

In order to develop a comprehensive picture of the staffing levels and workload for the student support services disciplines in Minnesota, the task force used the STAR (**ST**aff **A**utomated **R**eporting) data and the Workload Considerations for Effective Special Education Manual (2003)[\[4\]](#). STAR is a web-based system used by school districts to report employment and assignment information to the Department of Education. Although the special education workload project addresses the workload issues for special education service providers the task force used the information from this model as a basis for discussion and recommendations. (*Note: chemical health counselors are not included in the STAR reporting method.*)

School Counselors operate from a foundation of developmental psychology, educational philosophy and counseling methodology. Proactive and preventive in focus, school counselors assist students in acquiring and using lifelong skills through the development of academic, career, self-awareness and interpersonal communication skills. The goal of the comprehensive school counseling program is to provide all students with life success skills.

The national association recommended school counselor-to-student ratio is 1:250.

- *The current national average is 1:488*
- *Arizona, California and Minnesota have the highest ratios at 783, 966 and 792, respectively*
- *School Counselor staffing in MN is 1035.44 (head count 1157)*

<i>Elementary</i>	<i>136.36 (168 head count)</i>
<i>Middle</i>	<i>143.83 (165 head count)</i>
<i>Secondary</i>	<i>755.25 (824 head count)</i>

School Social Workers are the link between home, school and community. School social workers have specialized training that enables them to understand the individual student within and across their interactive environment of home school and community. They provide consultation, assessment, crisis intervention and prevention, counseling and mental health services. School social workers are dedicated to helping each student fully develop their individual potential socially, emotionally and intellectually.

The national association recommended school social worker-to-student ratio is 1:400.

- *School Social Worker staffing in MN is 930 FTE (998 head count)*
- *Approximately a 1/890 ratio*

School Psychologists have specialized training in psychology and education. School psychologists tailor their service to the particular needs of each child. They provide service in consultation, assessment, crisis intervention and prevention, research and planning, counseling and developing partnerships with parents and teachers to create healthy school environments.

The national association recommended ratio of school psychologist- to- students is 1:1000.

- *School Psychologist staffing in MN is 619.56 FTE (676 head count)*
- *Approximately 1/1335.5 ratio*

School Nurses are a specialized practice of professional nursing that advances the wellbeing, academic success and life-long achievement of students. School nurses facilitate positive responses to normal development; promote health and safety; intervene regarding health problems; provide case management services; and actively collaborate with others to build student and family capacity for adaptation, self-management, self advocacy and learning.

In regular education settings, the school nurse-to-student minimum ratio is 1:750; with students with special needs included in the school the ratio becomes 1:250; and in setting with students with multiple needs, the ratio is 1:125.

- *An encompassing ratio is 1:600.*
- *School Nurse staffing in MN is 462.72 (541 head count)*

Chemical Health Specialists provide focus on the prevention and intervention of use of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use by youth. The chemical health services include information, education, pre-assessment screening for use of chemicals, supportive counseling, life skills development early intervention and transition support for clinical services.

Each school district needs as least one full time Chemical Health Coordinator to manage a comprehensive, district-wide programs and services. Each school building needs as least one chemical health counselor on site to provide direct services one full day per week throughout the school year. Schools with large special needs populations require more direct-access time.

- *Estimated Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs counselor staffing in MN is 300*

Describing workload issues for the student support services personnel is a complicated issue that does not have much of a research base. A special educator's workload is calculated by documenting the student service minutes (direct + indirect + evaluation) and actual staff availability during the instructional day. The task force found that although there were some similarities between the special educator's workload and theirs, it was not precise enough to be a useful in this discussion. The task force did though, identify in generalities the elements or roles and responsibilities for a student support staff's position.

The task force defined their collective work in schools as:

- Individual student support (direct and indirect)
- Team support (direct and indirect)
- Documentation (reports, case notes, evaluations, etc.)
- Consultation/ resource (to teachers and classroom)
- Professional development
- Inter-agency collaboration
- Other duties as assigned

The underlying issue for school districts is that when planning for student support services, the following needs to be taken into consideration for the supportive services to be effective for students:

- All the duties and responsibilities assigned to these positions, and
- The needs of the building/district.

Explore Opportunities for Additional Funding to Improve Access

School district funding for student support services in Minnesota was summarized for the task force by Tom Melcher, Director of Program Finance and Audrey Bomstad, Supervisor of Budgets Payments, Special Education and Fiscal Monitoring of Facilities.

In Minnesota, there are numerous sources of funding for student support services: state special education, federal special education, federal title programs, general education unrestricted , general education restricted (basic skills revenue), integration revenue, safe school-crime levy, non public aid fund, Indian school assistance and Local Collaborative Time Study (LCTS) dollars.

The following table based on 2004-2005 data demonstrates the sources of funding for student support services personnel in Minnesota.

Category	FTE	% Federal Funding	% State & Local Funding
Counselors	1,054.13	3.6%	96.4%
Nurses	468.57	30.0%	70.0%
Psychologists	609.71	98.6%	1.4%
Social Workers	930.15	77.3%	22.7%

Total/Average	3,062.56	52.2%	47.8%
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Sources: EDRS & UFARS

Not including Chemical Health Specialists, the total expenditure for student support services in Minnesota during the 2004-2005 SY was \$ 75,680,539.73.

Cathy Griffin, Third Party Reimbursement Policy Specialist for the Minnesota Department of Education presented information to the task force regarding accessing medical assistance funding for the assessment, diagnosis, counseling, educational, therapeutic and other necessary services they provide to eligible students. According to this presentation, Minnesota schools are accessing less than 10% of the revenue available to them through this third party funding mechanism.

The task force discussed the need to work with Minnesota school districts to determine if there are currently services covered by Minnesota Health Care Program (MHCP) that student support service staff provides that should be billed and to explore offering as many allowable services as possible to maximize revenue generation.

The 2007 Minnesota Legislature expanded the eligible uses of the safe schools levy to include voluntary opt-in suicide prevention tools and clarifies that a school district may use this revenue to pay costs for licensed school counselors, licensed school nurses, licensed school social workers, licensed school psychologists, and licensed alcohol and chemical dependency counselors to help provide early responses to problems. The amount of the safe schools levy money used for student support services personnel must supplement and not supplant other expenditures made by the school district for this purpose. Minn. Stat. §126C.44 (a)

Funding for student support services come mostly from public sources (federal, state and local government) but as the task force found, there is also the opportunity to access funds for student support services through the third party revenue streams. It is important that Minnesota schools take advantage of all available funding streams to maintain current level of student support services and hopefully to improve access by increasing staffing in this very important service area.

Best Practice Framework for Action

The task force created a framework for the provision of student support services that allows for local decision-making in order to deploy resources in such a way as to develop a comprehensive program of student support services that provides for student educational achievement, student safety and enhances student physical, emotional and social well-being.

Recommendation 1:

Each school district /school conduct a needs assessment to determine student needs.

Action Steps

1. Conduct a building/district-wide needs assessment. Include consideration of the following variables:
 - a. Current student population demographics: Free and Reduced Lunch status, race/ethnicity, English Language Learners status, gender, grade, etc.
 - b. Community rates for risk indicators such as divorce, homelessness, incarceration, welfare, joblessness, single-parent families, drug/alcohol use, etc.
 - c. Number of students receiving modifications or accommodations through a 504 Plan
 - d. Number of students receiving special education services
 - e. Number of students receiving special education services that are included in low incidence populations (i.e., under the categories of Autism Spectrum Disorder, Developmental Cognitive Delay, Deaf-Blind, Deaf & Hard of Hearing, Severely Multiply Impaired, Visual Impairment, and Physical Impaired).
 - f. Identified rates of students with mental health diagnoses or who indicate significant mental health needs.
 - g. Identified rates of students with chemical health needs.
 - h. Identified rates of students with physical health diagnoses or who indicate significant physical health needs.

2. Recommended data sources for the workload study are the following (not an exhaustive list):
 - a. Community mental health and chemical health services on clientele, numbers of school age children
 - b. Minnesota Student Survey
 - c. Student demographics (see 1a)
 - d. Community prevalence rates for risk indicators (see 1b)

3. Use these data to plan for maximum utilization of student support service personnel skills relative to student needs and available time, money, and resources.

4. Include student support service personnel on teams involved in discussions and decision-making using these data.

Recommendation 2:

Determine differentiated level of Student Support Services to meet the needs of students, teachers and others.

Action Steps

1. Conduct a study of current workload for individual student support service disciplines. The same data can be used as in the student needs assessment (see Guideline #2) with some additional considerations:
 - a. Recommended student support staff-to-student ratios by national organizations
 - b. Current caseloads
 - c. Current FTE of student support service personnel in the district
 - d. Actual tasks, consumers served, and time spent working as reported by student support service personnel.

The purpose of the workload study is to balance maximum utilization of the skill-sets and strengths that are present in individual student support service disciplines with reasonable demands on individual time, resources, and physical presence in the building/district.

2. Conduct a brief, statewide time sampling study of student support service personnel that asks a random selection to complete a timesheet for one working week indicating what tasks they do, who they are completing the task with (e.g., students, teachers, administrators), and how much time they spend on each task.

Recommendation 3:

Design an evaluation strategy to measure the impact that student support services have on the academic and social-emotional outcomes of students.

Action Steps

1. Consider multiple measures of both academic and social/emotional outcomes such as (not an exhaustive list):
 - a. Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments II
 - b. Minnesota Basic Skills Tests
 - c. Grades
 - d. Attendance
 - e. Discipline referrals
 - f. School suspensions
 - g. Minnesota Student Survey data
 - h. Locally collected data, e.g.,
 - General Outcome Measures/Curriculum-Based Measures,
 - NWEA
 - Measures of Academic Progress (MAPs),
 - School or district-wide screening (e.g., depression, student engagement, chemical use, etc.), etc.

2. Use data that are collected formative and summative.
3. Use measures that psychometrically valid and reliable for the purposes of which they are being used.
4. Create a clear, strategic plan for outcome data collection, analysis, and evaluation of data results.
5. Include student support services in problem-solving discussions related to the outcome data.
6. Apply the outcome data. In this discussion include application of the data to creating a direction for future use of resources, time, money, and delineation of tasks and roles for student support services.

Conclusion

Minnesota schools need to assess the role of the student support professionals in individual school buildings and districts to ensure that all children and youth have access to the supports and services they need. The task force has identified the lack of access to the supports and services provided by the licensed professional student support services personnel to children and youth in Minnesota schools, because of understaffing and under funding.

It is very important that Minnesota schools (K-12) be directed to conduct an assessment of the needs of their students, to identify the barriers that interfere with school success in order to determine the level of student support services, to meet the needs, to allocate adequate resources to provide the necessary learning support and to measure outcomes.

May 22, 2007

References

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[2] Elementary and Secondary Education Act (2001) 20 USC § 7801 (36) (A) Downloaded from <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg107.html>

[3] Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) 34 CFR. 300.34(a). Downloaded from <http://idea.ed.gov>

[4] Minnesota Department of Education(2003) *Workload Considerations for Effective Special Education*
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