

Ready or Not, Here They Come: School Mental Health Partnerships

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Objectives

1. Understand emerging trends in Expanded School Mental Health (ESMH)
2. Describe key challenges and opportunities for schools and SSW's in ESMH partnerships
3. Identify expanded roles for SSW's employed in schools with ESMH programs
4. Understand ways to improve collaboration with school-based mental health staff
5. Acquire strategies for facilitating effective school mental health partnerships

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Topics

- A. Rationale For Expansion Of ESMH**
- B. Schools Benefit From ESMH Partnerships
- C. Benefits For Agencies
- D. ESMH Best Practice
- E. Key Emerging Trends
- F. Traditional SSW Roles
- G. SSW Skill Sets For Role Expansion
- H. Why Should SSW's Prioritize These Expanded Roles?
- I. Strategies For Effective Partnerships
- J. Strategies For SSW's To Shift Towards Broader Roles
- K. Summary And Discussion

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Rationale For Expansion Of ESMH

- High volume of students with mental health needs who are unable to access appropriate services
- SSW's and other school-employed mental health professionals are:
 - Limited in number, compared with student needs
 - Overburdened with multiple responsibilities
 - Forced to be reactive rather than proactive
 - Unable to successfully link all students/families with traditional community-based mental health services
- Increased evidence of connection between social-emotional health and academic achievement

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Rationale For Expansion Of ESMH

- Increase in government mandates and funding opportunities which support ESMH
- Shift in school reform priorities – towards "whole child" and "whole school" focus

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Schools Benefit From ESMH Partnerships

- Additional staff to serve more children
- Varied programming which schools are unable or unwilling to provide on their own
- Elimination of barriers commonly experienced in the community mental health system
- Financial support and opportunities to leverage funding through affiliation with governmental and nonprofit agencies
- Shared liability for serving high-need children
- Access to, and expertise with, evidence-based programs
- Enhanced professional development for school staff

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Benefits For Agencies

- Improved access to priority client population
- Elimination of family transportation barrier
- Opportunities to leverage and extend funding
- Higher staff productivity
- Ability to serve greater number of youth through school-based prevention programs
- Ability to provide services to children in their natural environment
- Reduced stigma

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ESMH Best Practice

Successful ESMH Collaboratives:

1. Are part of comprehensive learning support systems.
2. Help build capacity of schools to promote the mental health of all students and address non-academic barriers to learning.
3. Include a continuum of coordinated, multi-tiered, evidence-based practices and programs.
4. Are fully integrated with strategic, comprehensive, school improvement initiatives.
5. Weave together school and community supports and resources.
6. Are delivered by a variety of school and community mental health professionals and educators.

ESMH Best Practice

Successful ESMH Collaboratives: (continued)

7. Are focused on "whole-student" and "whole school"
8. Require a high level of collaboration and communication
9. Require commitment and active involvement of key stakeholders, at all stages of implementation
10. Require modifications in school infrastructure
11. Are supported by a variety of federal, state and local mandates and funding opportunities
12. Are designed to augment and enhance existing student support programs, rather than replace or duplicate

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Key Emerging Trends

- Coordination and integration of academic and non-academic supports, in order to reduce fragmentation and marginalization
- System design focuses on multi-tiered interventions
- Paradigm shift towards health promotion and prevention curriculum for all students (Public health model, character education, social emotional learning, changes in IDEA...)
- Expectation that evidence based practices and interventions will be implemented

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Traditional SSW Roles

- Multiple variables determine SSW role priorities
- Primarily student-focused, assigned to one or more schools
- "Bread and Butter" Roles:
Psychosocial assessment, crisis intervention, indiv/group counselling, care coordination, liaison between school, home and community, consultation with school staff, participation on student support teams
- Rationale for SSW vulnerability: The provision of student-focused mental health services is also the primary role that school-based mental health staff are contracted to provide

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SSW Skill Sets For Role Expansion

SSW's are uniquely qualified to assume broader roles in ESMH partnerships:

1. Utilize systems training and ecological framework
2. Trained to provide interventions on multiple tiers (prevention, early intervention, intensive)
3. Have skills which target multiple domains of student functioning (individual, peers, school, family, and community)
4. Are able to articulate how social work interventions support student learning and educational outcomes.

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SSW Skill Sets For Role Expansion

5. Participate on, and lead, school based, interdisciplinary teams; help facilitate team development, problem solving and collaboration skills
6. Are familiar with school culture and school climate, and a broader "whole school" ecological perspective
7. Can assist with school resource mapping and needs analysis
8. Already serve as connectors to community resources, and network with community mental health agency staff
9. Can help identify mutual benefits which are available through new school-community partnerships

SSW Skill Sets For Role Expansion

10. Are proficient at working across systems and across professions
11. Are capable of assisting school administrators with program development and planning of ESMH partnerships
12. Can apply SSW understanding of systems change and advocacy, to helping facilitate school improvement initiatives

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Why Should SSW's Prioritize These Expanded Roles?

- Successful and effective ESMH partnerships lead to reduced numbers of student referrals and fewer school crises
- ESMH expansion is aligned with SSW program goals to:
 - Ensure that the mental health needs of all children and youth are adequately met
 - Build capacity for mental health promotion and prevention
 - Improve the school environment for students
 - Improve staff morale
 - Maximize SSW job satisfaction and job stability

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Strategies For Effective Partnerships

1. The Diversity of School-Based Agency Staff

- Varied professional training, experience, and skill sets.
 - May not have had training or experience working in schools.
 - Variability in certification and licensure standards
 - Agency workers tend to have much higher rates of turnover, compared with school-employed staff.
- Agency job descriptions may vary.
- Agency policies and procedures differ from school policies and procedures, especially in areas such as confidentiality and mandated reporting.
- Agency staff work different schedules.

Continued ...

Strategies For Effective Partnerships

1. The Diversity of School-Based Agency Staff continued

- Often excessive documentation responsibilities
- Required to meet standards for "productivity"
- May not be able to see students who are not on their *defined* caseload

Strategies For Effective Partnerships

2. Procedures for Effective Partnerships

- Develop a system for referrals and shared responsibilities
- Define expectations and structures for collaboration.
- Request to participate in hiring school-based staff.
- Develop an orientation for school-based staff
 - Overview of school management structures, Board of Education, and school mission
 - Schools, neighborhoods, and student population
 - Roles of pupil support professionals
 - Building-based support systems
 - Procedures for referrals, access to students, crisis intervention, parent consent and involvement, etc.

Strategies For Effective Partnerships

3. Tips for Collaboration

- Collaboration requires sufficient regular meeting times and opportunities for team building
- Recognize that differences in training and expertise can lead to differences in perspectives and varied approaches to resolving problems
- Emphasize mutual commitment to improving outcomes for children
- Identify opportunities to enhance each professionals' knowledge of mental health
- Assist in introducing agency staff to school-employed staff
- Prioritize relationship-building and team-building with school and community staff

Strategies For Effective Partnerships

4. Managing Turf Issues

- Accept that turf issues inevitably arise
 - Overlapping roles
 - Lack of appreciation
 - Job insecurity
 - Questions about commitment
- Prioritize relationship-building
 - Build communication channels
- Identify areas of expertise to determine who is best able to help.

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Strategies For SSW's To Shift Towards Broader Roles

Educate Yourself

- See Resource List handout
- Review key ESMH websites, including the two national technical assistance training centers for school mental health:
 - <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu> and
 - <http://csmha.umaryland.edu>
- Review structures and activities of federal, state, and local government and non-profit agencies, especially those responsible for mental health and education
- Attend local school board meetings and investigate district-level school improvement initiatives

Strategies For SSW's To Shift Towards Broader Roles

Educate Yourself (continued)

- Research evidence-based practices which have been successfully implemented in schools, including both student-focused and system-focused interventions (i.e. bullying)
- Identify areas for professional development, especially:
 - Program design and program development
 - Strategic planning
 - Models of collaboration and team problem-solving
 - Program evaluation

Strategies For SSW's To Shift Towards Broader Roles

Network

- Obtain supervisory support to increase community networking activities, building on what you are already doing.
- Explore existent school-community partnerships at the local and state levels.
- Explore funding opportunities for initiating or expanding partnerships.

Strategies For SSW's To Shift Towards Broader Roles

Market Yourself

- Ensure that your administrator is familiar with your training, skill sets, abilities and experiences
- Provide data to prove that SSW interventions improve both student and school outcomes
- Explore with your supervisor ways of broadening your SSW role, and obtain support for facilitating and coordinating ESMH
- Identify and reach out to key school and community stakeholders

Strategies For SSW's To Shift Towards Broader Roles

Market Yourself (continued)

- Help stakeholders understand how SSW training, skills and roles **are uniquely different** from school-based staff:
 - SSW's speak "school" and support educational mission
 - Are able to describe the impact of mental health issues on school functioning
 - Receive direction from school administrators
 - Have a "whole school" focus, in addition to student-focus
 - Are experts in accessing school-community resources
 - Have advanced skills in facilitating collaboration
 - SSW's remain in schools over time, working with multiple generations of families

Strategies For SSW's To Shift Towards Broader Roles

Assist In Planning ESMH Initiatives

- Invite yourself to the planning table
- Participate on and/or lead Resource Coordinating teams
 - Resource Mapping
 - School/community needs assessment
 - Identify gaps in services
- Anticipate potential barriers to implementation and plan for them
- Assist in developing policy (district-level) to create systems for implementation
- Build in training for all stakeholders on identifying students with MH issues

Strategies For SSW's To Shift Towards Broader Roles

Assist in Planning ESMH Initiatives (continued)

- Secure signed MOU's/ Referral Agreements with local agencies
- Draft letters of support
- Develop referral protocols and procedures
- Create forms for information sharing
- Assure cultural competence throughout ESMH system

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Summary and Discussion

- ESMH creates significant opportunities to help address barriers to student learning, by providing a continuum of supports for our students, families and staff
- It takes an investment of time to build trust and collaboration in relationships with school-based mental health staff
- SSW's at a minimum, need to learn how to work effectively and collaboratively within ESMH partnerships
- SSW's may want to explore ways to re-prioritize and re-shape their current roles, in an era of expanded school mental health partnerships
- SSW's are uniquely suited to take on a facilitation and coordination role in school-community initiatives

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