

ARIZONA SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS' RESOURCE GUIDE



A COMPREHENSIVE BREAKDOWN OF SCHOOL-BASED
MENTAL HEALTH ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES



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In today's educational landscape, the role of school mental health professionals has never been more critical. They are the foundation of a thriving school environment, fostering the well-being of students and staff while ensuring academic and personal growth. This guide serves as a comprehensive resource for school - based counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses—equipping them with the tools, frameworks, and knowledge to navigate the challenges of modern education.

With a focus on evidence-based practices, multi-tiered system of supports, and collaboration, this guide highlights the essential contributions of each mental health role. Whether you're addressing emotional challenges, building robust intervention programs, or collaborating with families and communities, this guide will support your journey in creating a nurturing, inclusive, and high-achieving school environment.

Together, let's champion the mental health and success of every student.





As vital members of the education team, school counselors play an essential specialized role in promoting a school culture that helps to achieve the school's mission of successfully educating the whole child to be a lifelong learner and career and college ready. School counselors design, deliver, and assess data driven school counseling programs that are comprehensive in scope, preventive in design and developmental in nature to improve a range of student learning and behavioral outcomes through evidence-based practices.



School counselors help all students:

- apply academic achievement strategies
- manage emotions and apply interpersonal skills
- strengthen mental wellness and
- explore and plan for postsecondary options such as higher education, military, and work force



SCHOOL COUNSELORS IMPROVE COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS THROUGH:

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS EFFORTS

- Schoolwide classroom instruction for all students in three domains to enhance student learning and support post-secondary readiness: Academic, career, and social development.
- Social/emotional instruction to promote protective factors that shield against mental health health risks.
- Support mental wellness on a continuum of care, or a tiered system using evidence based practices.
- Tier 1 services and interventions are intended for all students, developmental in nature and aimed at prevention.
- Tier 2 interventions are directed at specific concerns.
- Tier 3 are the most intensive interventions. School counselors respond to students in crisis and participate in teams to provide wraparound services. Students in Tier 3 are referred to an outside agency in the school or community for on-going help.

APPROPRIATE ROLES	Refer to the American School Counselor Association appropriate duties LINKED HERE
PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS, CERTIFICATIONS, AND/OR LICENSURE	• ASCA Professional Standards LINK • ASCA Ethical Standards • MAED in School Counseling • ADE Certified School Counselor
STUDENT RATIO RECOMMENDATIONS	The ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association is 1:250
RESOURCES	• AZ School Counselor Association • American School Counselor Association • Association for Career and Technical Education - Arizona • Association for Career and Technical Education



School social workers are trained mental health professionals with specialization in working with students and families. School Social Workers provide comprehensive supports and services that address social behaviors, emotional wellness, and systemic barriers to learning.

School social workers provide both direct and indirect services to students, families, schools and districts at all tiers of intervention to promote students' academic and social success and well-being.



Research shows that school social work services contribute to better student success by improving academic performance, ensuring physical and psychological safety, supporting mental and behavioral health, increasing attendance, strengthening social skills, and fostering greater family and community involvement.

Social workers practice from the unique “person in environment” perspective and as such work between various systems within the students environment (school, family, and community) to affect change. School social workers are the link between the home, school, and community.



SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS IMPROVE COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS THROUGH:

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS EFFORTS

Tier I:

- Implement schoolwide evidence-based programs and practices that promote a safe and supportive school climate for all students and support positive student mental health.
- Build capacity of family members, school staff and systems and community agencies to support positive outcomes for students.
- Build robust community partnerships to assist students and families and ensure equitable access to care.

Tier II:

- Identify, assess and develop interventions for at risk students.
- Provide direct, evidence based counseling services to students, families and staff.

Tier III:

- Connect students and families with community based behavioral health services and facilitate coordination of wrap around services.
- Provide crisis intervention and postvention as needed.

APPROPRIATE ROLES

- Implement systems and schoolwide evidence-based programs and practices that support positive mental health for all students.
- Assess and provide individual and small group counseling services determined by student need.
- Provide referrals, case management and coordination of services for school based and community based services.
- Participate in special education processes, meetings and assessments.
- Consult and assist in developing intervention plans for students.
- Provide crisis intervention and postvention support and services.
- Provide support to staff to understand factors that affect student mental health, performance and behavior.
- Implement site and district level programs, systems and professional development that support student academic success and mental health.



PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS, CERTIFICATIONS, AND/OR LICENSURE	• Adhere to the NASW Code of Ethics • Master of Social Work (MSW) from an accredited university • ADE School Social Work Certificate, recommended • Licensure from AZBBHE (LMSW or LCSW) • Certification/Licensure requirements are made at the discretion of LEA's and/or is determined by the nature of the specific school social work role
STUDENT RATIO RECOMMENDATIONS	The student to school social worker ratio recommended by the School Social Work Association of America is 1:250

Reference: [School Social Work Association of Arizona](#)





School psychology is a specialized area within the field of psychology that includes advanced training in mental health, data analysis and interpretation as related to academic and behavioral functioning at both the group- and individual student level. As vital members of a school's education team, school psychologists apply strategies for positive academic and behavioral outcomes for children within the context of the academic learning environment. School psychologists often help develop system level improvements intended to reach all students and provide direct, targeted academic and behavioral health services to identified individual students and /student groups in need of more support.

School psychologists are trained to deliver services at both the system- and student-level to ensure that all students have access to services, based on need. The proportion of time school psychologists engage in each area of service depends on contextual factors, including the school's needs, students, families, and community served. Additionally, due to their training in IDEA evaluation and identification, shortages in providers may result in school psychologists having to prioritize certain service types over others to meet federal and state special education requirements.





SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS IMPROVE COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS THROUGH:

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS EFFORTS

- Inform on meaningful assessment, screening, and progress monitoring
- Identify evidence-based programs and strategies for prevention and interventions
- Support professional development
- Evaluate implementation fidelity
- Consult and coach

APPROPRIATE ROLES

- Implement systems and schoolwide evidence based programs and practices that support positive mental health for all students.
- Assess and provide individual and small group counseling services determined by student need.
- Provide referrals, case management and coordination of services for school-based and community-based services, including behavioral health services.
- Participate in special education processes, meetings and assessments as needed.
- Consult and assist in developing intervention plans for students.
- Provide crisis intervention and postvention support and services.
- Provide support to staff to understand factors that affect student mental health, performance and behavior.
- Implement site and district level programs, systems and professional development that support student mental health.





PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS, CERTIFICATIONS, AND/OR LICENSURE

Credentials with a study emphasis in the field of school psychology

- Master of Arts in School Psychology (M.A.)
- Master of Science in School Psychology (M.S.)
- Educational Specialist in School Psychology (Ed.S.)
- Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)
- Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)
- Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.)

Certification/License

- State certification required
- National certification optional
- Licensure optional (doctorate only)

STUDENT RATIO RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1: 500 students (recommended national standard)
- The school psychologist-to-student ratio may need to be lower when:
 - working with student populations that have
 - intensive special education needs
 - been disproportionately affected by poverty, trauma, and environmental stressors
 - assigned to itinerant positions that require travel between schools and in developing and maintaining collaborative relationships in multiple sites.

RESOURCES

- National Association of School Psychologists
- [About School Psychology](#)
 - [Professional Standards](#)
 - [Professional Ethics](#)
 - [NASP Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services](#)
- [Arizona Association of School Psychologists](#)





As essential school mental health professionals, school nurses are trained to recognize early signs of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. They provide immediate support, crisis intervention, and referrals to mental health resources. By offering a safe space for students, educating on coping strategies, and advocating for mental well-being, school nurses help bridge the gap between physical and emotional health.



School nurses deliver comprehensive health service in a systematic, planned approach that includes:

- Promoting healthy school environments
- Providing health education training to students and staff
- Developing and implementing school health policies
- Addressing individual student health needs
- Managing student chronic health condition



SCHOOL NURSES IMPROVE COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS THROUGH:

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS EFFORTS

- Ensure practice consistent with the scope and standards of school nursing practice, health and education laws (consider the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Nurse Practice Act, state laws regarding school nursing practice and delegation), federal/state/local policies and regulations, and NASN position statements and code of ethics.
- Employ clinical judgment and critical thinking outlined in nursing process and prioritization.
- Integrate evidence-based and best/promising practices (consider multi-tiered systems of support, clinical practice guidelines).
- Safeguard privacy of students and data (consider Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act).

APPROPRIATE ROLES

- Care Coordination
- Leadership
- Community/Public Health
- Quality Improvement
- [School Nursing Framework](#)

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS, CERTIFICATIONS, AND/OR LICENSURE

- Licensed by the Arizona State Board of Nursing; a baccalaureate degree, preferably in nursing, with a focus on public health nursing, theory and practice is strongly recommended.
- Uphold Nurse Practice Act and National Association of School Nurses (NASN) standards.
- May be nationally certified by the National Board for Certification of School Nurses (NBCSN). This is noted by the credentials of NCSN (National Certified School Nurse) after their name.
- Maintain professional self-growth: professional development through continuing education, and support of professional organizations.



STUDENT RATIO RECCOMENDATIONS

Student acuity and school community indicators should be assessed to determine appropriate staffing levels. Access to a school nurse may mean that more than one school nurse is necessary to meet the needs of the school population. School nurse workloads should be evaluated on at least an annual basis to meet the health and safety needs of school communities. Using the ratio of nurse to student alone is not evidence-based or appropriate.

RESOURCES

- [National Association of School Nurses](#)
- [National Association of School Nurses: Framework](#)
- [National Association of School Nurses: School Nurse Workload](#)
- [School Nurses AOrganization of Arizona](#)
- [Arizona Department of Health Services: School Nursing](#)
- [Arizona Department of Education: School Nursing & Health Services](#)





Integrating community behavioral health providers into comprehensive school mental health systems is an essential component of ensuring sustainability for long term access to mental health services for students. Through both formal and informal partnerships, community providers can support schools, students, families, and the community at large when it comes to reducing the stigma of mental health, large-scale prevention efforts, and supporting mental health needs beyond the scope available within educational systems.



COMMUNITY PROVIDERS IMPROVE COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS THROUGH:

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORTS EFFORTS

Tier 1

- Provide professional development, support school-wide wellness initiatives, and assist in mental health prevention efforts.

Tier 2:

- Offer targeted interventions such as small group counseling and early intervention services for at-risk students.

Tier 3:

- Deliver direct clinical services, crisis response, and coordinate care with school staff and external agencies.

APPROPRIATE ROLES

- Deliver mental health services in collaboration with school-employed professionals.
- Conduct assessments and develop individualized treatment plans for students.
- Provide direct therapeutic services in individual and group settings.
- Participate in student support teams and contribute to intervention planning.
- Educate school staff and parents about mental health conditions and available resources.
- Avoid duplication of services provided by school counselors, social workers, and psychologists by working collaboratively within a school's mental health framework.

STUDENT RATIO RECOMMENDATIONS

Community mental health providers should adhere to the recommended ratios based on national standards for school mental health professionals.



PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS, CERTIFICATIONS, AND/OR LICENSURE

Community-based providers working in schools typically hold licensure in their respective disciplines, such as:

- Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)
- Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC)
- Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT)
- Licensed Psychologist (Ph.D. or Psy.D.)
- Certified Behavioral Health Specialists with training in evidence-based practices
- Providers must adhere to professional ethical guidelines and state regulations, and they may require specific agreements or certifications to practice within school settings.

RESOURCES

- National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH) tools
- National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center
- Arizona Department of Education School Behavioral Health Initiatives
- Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) School-Based Behavioral Health Services



SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH

RESOURCES

Arizona Association of School Counselors

WEBSITE: WWW.AZSCA.ORG

School Social Workers Association of Arizona

WEBSITE: WWW.SSWAAZ.ORG



Arizona Association of School Psychologists

WEBSITE: WWW.AASP-AZ.ORG

School Nurse Organization of Arizona

WEBSITE: WWW.SNOA.ORG

AHCCCS WEBPAGE - Behavioral Health in Schools

WEBSITE: WWW.AHCCCS.GOV

**THE SCHOOLS AND BEHAVIOR HEALTH
PARTNERSHIPS: A RESOURCE GUIDE**

