



ISSUE BRIEF



The Role of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel in School and Student Success

National Alliance of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel

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Issue Brief

A number of elements are key to providing students with the skills they need to be successful both in and out of school. Foundational to all efforts is a supportive school administrator, high-quality and fully trained educators, and engagement with parents and families. To complement and enhance the capacity and effectiveness of educators and administrators, each school must have adequate access to the full continuum of credentialed specialized instructional support personnel (SISP)—highly skilled professionals with specialized training who support students, families, educators, and administrators to help every child reach their full potential.

Who Are Specialized Instructional Support Personnel?

“Specialized instructional support personnel” are defined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), P.L. 114-95, sec. 8002 (47), as follows:

The term ‘specialized instructional support personnel’ means (i) school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists; and (ii) other qualified professional personnel, such as school nurses, speech language pathologists, and school librarians, involved in providing assessment, diagnosis, counseling, educational, therapeutic, and other necessary services (including related services as that term is defined in section 602 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 USC 1401)) as part of a comprehensive program to meet student needs.

The law explicitly mentions the role of SISP in numerous places, underscoring the critical value placed on them. For example, the ESSA states that SISP are an integral part of the development of state and local education plans to improve student outcomes (See Appendix A for a full citation of references to SISP in ESSA).

The definition of SISP in ESSA also incorporates, by reference, the definition of “related services personnel” under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). SISP and related services personnel are the same group of professionals, whose expertise should be available to all students, with and without disabilities. While SISP have historically been utilized mostly to support the needs of students with disabilities, best practice and the intention of federal law

necessitate all students have access to SISP and the services they provide.

The term SISP encompasses a diverse group of professions, each of which has unique yet complementary skill sets that support student learning.¹ Collectively, SISP provide and support school-wide universal services that facilitate positive conditions for learning, support student health and well-being, foster social and emotional development, and address barriers to educational success. They provide direct services to individual students, groups of students, and entire classrooms, and they support, collaborate and consult with educators, administrators, other school staff, parents, and community agencies and providers to help students achieve their academic and personal goals.

¹ <https://nasisp.org/services-resources/service-descriptions/>

How Do Specialized Instructional Support Personnel Support Student Success?

SISP provide a wide range of culturally responsive school-based prevention, promotion, and intervention services to help students become effective learners. They work with teachers, principals, other SISP, and parents to ensure all students are successful in school. SISP foster collaboration between general and special education teachers, but also among school staff, families, and the community. SISP provide consultation, assessments linked to instruction, individual and group counseling, problem-solving instruction, and remedial interventions to support student learning. They support teachers by offering professional development for instructional strategies to improve classroom management and ensure high-quality teaching and learning opportunities. They collaborate to identify students with special physical, social, or learning needs and address barriers to educational success, ensure positive conditions for learning, and help all students achieve academically.

Multitiered System of Supports

SISP are trained in effective early identification practices to facilitate early intervention for students with academic, social, and behavioral challenges and other barriers to success. They use a multitiered systems of support (MTSS) framework to provide a continuum of universal, targeted, and individualized interventions to support improved academic, mental health, and behavioral outcomes for all students.

The use of MTSS, including positive behavior interventions and supports, response to intervention, and early intervening services, has been shown to improve school climate, support student well-being, decrease negative behavior, and improve student academic achievement. SISP are uniquely trained to develop and implement evidence-based supports at each tier that address the challenges impeding student success. These highly trained professionals must be a part of the multidisciplinary team that

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directs, implements, and evaluates the use of these universal, small group, and individual service delivery and intervention models.

Evidence-Based Decision Making and Problem Solving

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Academic Skills Support

Specialized instructional support personnel work with educators, school leaders, and fellow SISP to support student attainment of literacy and numeracy skills. SISP can support school leaders in the selection and evaluation of core curricular materials and work with classroom teachers to design, implement, and evaluate whole class interventions to promote student learning. In addition to providing direct interventions for individual or groups of students, SISP consult with classroom teachers and other educators to identify barriers to learning for specific groups of or individual students and identify strategies to lower such barriers, provide education to parents and families to support student learning in the home, and help students to participate actively in their educational plans and goals by identifying their strengths and needs.

SISP should also be engaged in determinations of the need for modifications or accommodations a student may require to access information and demonstrate progress toward meeting academic standards. SISP work with parents and families, students, and other educators to identify individuals' needs and facilitate coordination and integration of all services and supports within the overall educational program.

Self-Advocacy & Self-Determination

The development of self-determination and advocacy skills are critical for students and adults with and without disabilities. Self-advocacy revolves around concepts of knowledge of self and knowledge of one's rights. Advocating for oneself includes making one's own decisions about life, learning how to obtain information to gain an understanding about issues of personal interest or importance, developing a network of support, knowing one's rights and responsibilities, reaching out to others when in need of assistance, and learning about self-determination

Self-determination is the process by which individuals demonstrate control over their own lives, make choices, and demonstrate mastery and competence. Self-determination is the strongest predictor for a successful transition to adulthood. Adolescents who are more self-determined when they leave school are more likely to be employed and live independently. Therefore, promoting both self-advocacy and self-determination is critical to a successful transition, especially for students with disabilities and other challenges.

Universal Design for Learning

Universal design for learning is a framework that supports effective teaching and assessment responsive to the learning needs of students of all abilities. States and local school districts have flexibility to design innovative approaches to assessment of student learning that capture progress in a variety of modalities. SISP work with teachers and administrators to help design instructional methods and assessments that ensure all students can access classroom instruction, have multiple ways to express mastery, and are fully engaged in the learning process.



Following principles of universal design, SISP also ensure students are provided multiple means of action and expression including providing options for physical action, communication, and executive functioning. SISP reduce barriers to accessibility by optimizing environments to help students better navigate motor domains, interact with learning experiences, and communicate with their peers and school staff.

Transitions

The goal for all students is to be prepared for adult life, including continued education, employment, independent living, and community engagement. SISP promote positive postschool outcomes through collaboration with the educational team to help students develop the skills needed for transition to adulthood. SISP design assessments and interventions to support evidence-based postschool readiness indicators including attendance, academic success, community experiences, work experience, involvement in extracurricular activities, and social and emotional learning. SISP work with students, parents and families, and other school personnel to identify individual students' interests and goals for life after graduation and create a plan for student success. SISP support all students in being prepared for college or career, and life after high school.

Creating Safe and Supportive Learning Environments for All Students

SISP provide direct and indirect services to individual students and groups of students to ensure students are safe, healthy, and ready to learn. SISP should be present in schools in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of all students in general and special education. SISP promote the health and well-being of the whole child. They also participate in the creation of systems that support comprehensive service delivery and help schools address the following:

School Climate

As schools examine the needs of children to determine how they can improve academic success, evidence-based research shows a link between children's physical, social-emotional, and mental health and their academic outcomes. A safe and supportive school climate fosters children's positive experiences and promotes their safety, well-being, and academic success. SISP understand these connections and can contribute to the development of a positive school climate both at the systems level and at the individual level by:

- Helping school teams conduct needs assessments and tailor whole-school interventions based on the unique needs of the school community.
- Contributing to the comprehensive, valid, and reliable measurement of academic, social, emotional, communication, mental, and behavioral health indicators that drive effective school improvement and address barriers to learning.
- Helping to develop school practices to enhance parent and family engagement.
- Supporting the most vulnerable students and ensuring they feel welcomed and respected in school.
- Working with educators, administrators, and families to support students' social and emotional development.

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Chronic Absenteeism

SISP play an important role in keeping children in school and ready to learn. SISP provide strategies to support students with learning and behavior differences, thereby creating more inclusive and integrated classrooms where students feel a sense of belonging and readiness to learn. There are many reasons children are chronically absent—such as chronic health conditions, problems with transportation to and from school, family systems issues, and feeling unsafe at school. SISP are in a unique position to help schools address the needs of children struggling with issues that lead to chronic absenteeism. They look for solutions and work with children and their families, including providing linkages to community resources.

Bullying

SISP have an impact on the health and safety of all students. This can include using evidence-based interventions to prevent and mitigate bullying in the school. Bullying can have serious and often long-term consequences for both the student who bullies and the student who is bullied, including increased school absenteeism, diminished educational achievement, behavior issues, low self-esteem, sleep deprivation, depression, anxiety, and self-harm. Because bullying produces such significant problems for students, both short and long term, the knowledge that SISP bring to the table is paramount.



Discipline

Many schools continue to rely on harmful and ineffective punitive discipline strategies such as suspension and expulsion. SISPs help develop, implement, and evaluate effective discipline policies and practices that address challenging behaviors and keep students in school so they can continue to learn. The use of suspension and expulsion can lead to increased risk of school dropout, engagement with the juvenile justice system, poor school climate, and increased risk of substance use and other risky behaviors.

Mental and Physical Health

In order for students to be academically successful, they must be healthy and strong, both physically and mentally. Children need to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to make healthy choices and to address health barriers to learning and academic success. Schools are increasingly looked upon as institutions that can play a critical role in improving the overall health status of our nation's youth. SISPs, in particular, contribute to the positive physical, mental, and behavioral health of all students through the development and implementation of school-wide approaches to school safety and violence prevention, positive behavioral interventions and supports, effective discipline policies, and social-emotional learning. SISPs also support suicide prevention and intervention efforts and help develop and implement evidence-based crisis prevention, intervention, and postvention services.

Conclusion

Improving student outcomes requires collaboration among a multidisciplinary team of school administrators, teachers, and specialized instructional support personnel. Far too often, SISPs are only utilized to provide services to students with disabilities or to meet other special education mandates, limiting access to the full range of services these professionals can provide. Utilizing SISPs to work with all students advances educational equity and improves outcomes for all.

About NASISP



The National Alliance of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel

(NASISP) represents over a million Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP) nationwide. SISPs are professionals who provide and support school-based prevention and intervention services to address barriers to educational success, ensure positive conditions for learning, and help all students achieve academically and ultimately become productive citizens. SISPs work with teachers, administrators, and parents to ensure that all students are successful in school. Our coalition seeks to empower our members and all SISP professionals by encouraging multidisciplinary collaboration, and affirming their role in education's best practices and their involvement in school improvement efforts.

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