

Bridging the Gap:

A look at effective collaborations
between School Social Workers and
School Psychologists

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Objectives

- Discuss the elements of effective collaboration
 - Discuss the impacts of collaboration on a variety of educational/community areas
 - Discuss successes and challenges involved in collaboration across disciplines
 - Help practitioners build skills to engage in effective collaboration
 - Develop a plan to begin or improve collaborative efforts
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Team Building Activity

- Some activity to teach/practice
 - Common purpose
 - Communication
 - Interdependence
 - Processing/monitoring
 - Personal accountability
- Create a situation where collaboration is supposed to occur to achieve success.

People working in a community-based setting need to know what they are doing and how to do it well enough to adapt to different contexts.

- quote from a special education teacher

Key Assumptions

In our collaboration experience, we have found greater success when these key assumptions are established before the project begins. Trust is the most critical key assumption because it produces a level of independence and respect for all parties involved in the collaboration process. Once trust is established there is a comfort in knowing that all tasks will be shared appropriately and completed in a timely fashion. When you recognize that the teams success relies heavily on each parties input, there is a greater sense of belonging and accountability established. When all of these factors are in place, you will have a successful outcome and positive project results.



Underlying Principles

- Everyone is focused on a common goal
- All participants are valued
- Individual perspectives are embraced
- There is a sense of purpose and urgency
- Trust and shared responsibility are key

It is critical when you are working with team members not to allow disciplines, titles, and positions overshadow the team's ultimate goal. The goal, no matter what the setting, should be to better serve your students, families, and or client/consumer population. We have seen that the multidisciplinary approach works best in our roles as service providers within a school system. We each offer a unique and important element to the students and families that we service.

What are the elements of effective collaboration?

➤ Face-to-Face Interaction

- Close office proximity
- Open door policy
- Flexible scheduling
- Availability

➤ Positive Interdependence

- Establish a common goal
- Dividing tasks based on strengths/skills
- Individual accountability
- Follow-up

What are the elements of effective collaboration?

➤ Interpersonal Skills

- Respect for diverse opinions
- Welcoming of different perspectives
- Look for and embrace similarities and differences

➤ Monitoring of Group Functioning

- Built-in processing, feedback, and evaluation opportunities
- Follow-up throughout the project

➤ Individual accountability

- Agendas, minutes, to-do lists, rotate roles

Most Important

- Of the 5 essential characteristics...
 - Which do you believe is most important? Why?
 - Which is the most difficulty to accomplish? Why?
 - Discuss with a partner and share with the group.

Why is cross-discipline collaboration important?

- Bridging the achievement gap
- Diverse program planning
- Student outreach
- Professional development
- Parent involvement
- Community engagement
- Grant proposal guidelines

School Impact

➤ 2007-2008 and prior

- 2 of 4 schools offered group counseling to approximately 15 students
- Parent workshops were conducted by the Parent Involvement Coordinator
- Professional Development
 - Conducted by administrators and academic coaches on differentiated instruction
- Student Health Survey data was collected, but not used

➤ 2008-2009

- All 4 schools and alternative school offered counseling to 74 students
- Parent workshops were conducted by a multi-disciplinary group
- Professional development
 - Culturally Relevant Teaching Practices
 - Dealing with Diversity
 - Response to Intervention
- Student Health Survey data was collected, analyzed, presented to administrators, and used to make program planning decisions

Community Impact

- Local community counseling providers have agreed to partner with the school to provide clinical counseling during the school day. They have also conducted professional development on warning signs of mental illness.
- The School Social Worker serves on the Family Connection Collaborative e-board.
- The School Psychologist serves as an Adult Advisor for the Youth Advisor Committee.
- Both presented at a recent Youth Leadership training event.
- Community after-school program providers attended a joint training with school staff.
- Student Health Survey results have been shared with school and community stakeholders. This data, along with youth focus group data, is being used to develop the Family Connection 3-year plan.
- Community “study circles” are being conducted with adults and teens to discuss issues that impact local youth.

Challenges

- Developing trust
- Gaining administrative support
- Finding time for planning
- Resolving differences of opinion
- What have you experienced?

Self-Reflection

- Complete the following statements:
 - A problem that needs collaborative effort is...
 - I would like to collaborate with...
 - In order to collaborate with them, I will...
- Using a piece of paper, write your responses to these statements
- Share your responses with a partner

Resources

- University of Vermont and PACER Center. (2008). *Critical Elements of Collaboration*. Retrieved from <http://www.uvm.edu/~pcl/Module%203%20Critical%20Elements%20of%20Collaboration.ppt>
- Usaj, K. Kullas, S. & Mandlawitz, M. (2008). *Response to Intervention: New Roles for School Social Workers*. Retrieved from http://www.sswaa.org/Role_of_SSW_in_RTI_FINAL_11-06.pdf
- National Association of School Psychologists (2006). *The Role of School Psychologists in the RTI Process*. Retrieved from http://www.nasponline.org/advocacy/RTIrole_NASP.pdf