

# Strengthen support for school-based mental health staff

## The challenge

The time school-based staff have to provide mental health support services is limited, and districts frequently face serious staff shortages for key positions (e.g., school psychologists).

In addition, because of competing demands, these staff members are often unable to spend time on the tasks that fully utilize their education and training and are most valuable for students. For example, inefficient paperwork and data systems, lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, and staff shortages could lead staff members to spend more time on tasks that do not make the best use of their skills and experience and that diminish the amount of time they spend on valuable direct student support.

Districts can take several actions to empower their mental health support staff to spend more time on the tasks that are most valuable to students.

## Purpose of this Promising Practice

This Promising Practice includes:

- [Approach and template for regular check-ins](#) between school and district leadership and staff providing dedicated mental health support to quickly identify and resolve challenges and ensure staff are able to practice at the “top of license.”

The following optional supporting resources may be useful for school and district leadership and staff to engage mental health professionals in communicating challenges and generating ideas for potential solutions:

- [Reflection exercise](#) for staff to communicate how they are asked to spend their time. Mental health professionals attending regular check-ins could complete this reflection before or during check-ins.
- [Resource to define potential staff roles](#) to support student mental health.

After completing these exercises, **your mental health support team will have established goals and identified necessary support to help them spend more time on tasks that are valuable to students.**

**Your next step will be to ensure staff are accountable for their goals and to oversee shifts in the work.** Consider reviewing the [Chiefs for Change Implementation Engine](#) for resources and processes to support initiative development and execution.

## Who might use this Promising Practice, and when?

This resource is for school districts that want to enable current mental health staff to maximize their time for direct student support.

It is designed for **district and school employees who are responsible for the time allocation of mental health support staff.** Likely roles include members of the district’s Student Services Department (e.g., the director of student support and health services manager).

# Approach and template for regular check-ins between school or district leadership and staff providing dedicated mental health support



## Who is this tool for?

This Promising Practice is designed for school employees who are responsible for managing and supporting mental health support staff. Likely roles include members of the school's Student Services Department (e.g., the director of student support and health services manager).

Responsible staff can use the check-in template to quickly identify and resolve barriers preventing dedicated mental health support staff from fully utilizing their education and training.



## Steps for using this tool (*supporting materials follow*):

1. Schedule a regular check-in (e.g., monthly or quarterly, 1-hour meeting) with staff members providing mental health support. A sample meeting agenda with guiding questions and a sample email for inviting relevant staff to the check-in meetings can be found below.
2. If helpful, you can use this [check-in action item tracker tool](#) to:
  - a. Review actions from the previous check-in and confirm progress on identified goals.
  - b. Discuss new or ongoing barriers preventing staff members from fully utilizing their education and training to support students.

Set clear plans for addressing each barrier, including who will be responsible and when the barrier will be addressed.

## Example meeting agenda with guiding questions

Consider reviewing this agenda at the beginning of each meeting and using the questions to guide discussions for each portion of the meeting.

Agenda item	Guiding questions	Estimated time required
<p><b>Review actions from the previous check-in</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What progress has been made on actions identified in previous check-in(s)?</li> <li>• What actions are behind schedule? What can be done to speed up these actions?</li> </ul>	<p>15 minutes</p>
<p><b>Discuss barriers preventing staff members from fully utilizing their education and training</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do staff need to better serve our students?</li> <li>• What barriers are preventing staff from fully utilizing their education and training in support of students; e.g., are staff struggling to secure space to meet with students? Are staff expected to spend time on tasks that do not fully utilize their education and training?</li> </ul> <p><i>The optional, editable <a href="#">reflection exercise</a> can help staff reflect on and communicate barriers to supporting students. You can allocate time during this meeting for staff to complete the reflection before starting the discussion or ask staff attending the meeting to complete the reflection in advance.</i></p>	<p>30 minutes</p>
<p><b>Set clear plans for addressing each barrier</b></p>	<p>What can be done to meet staff needs and remove barriers?</p> <p>Who will be responsible for each of the actions coming out of this check-in?</p> <p>By what date will these actions be completed?</p>	<p>15 minutes</p>

## Sample email inviting dedicated mental health support staff to the regular check-in

Hi [staff name],

The district has challenged our school to prioritize supporting mental health staff so we can better support students.

We know your time is precious, and often limited, which is why we want to enable you to focus on activities that will best serve our students. As part of this effort, we are planning to schedule quarterly check-ins with our mental health support staff.

The goal of these check-ins will be to:

Discuss new or ongoing barriers preventing staff members from fully utilizing their education and training to best serve our students.

Set clear plans for addressing each barrier, including who will be responsible and when the barrier will be addressed.

I'd like to find a recurring time that works for the entire team. Please complete the following survey to indicate your availability [e.g., insert Doodle poll here].

I look forward to working with all of you on this and to hearing how we can help free up your time so you can focus on the most impactful tasks.

[Signature]

## School Mental Health Support Staff Reflection

The district has challenged our school to prioritize supporting mental health staff so we can better support students. This short reflection aims to help staff members communicate new or ongoing barriers to fully utilizing their education and training to best serve our students. This reflection includes an optional section to help staff communicate how they are currently expected to spend their time.

Date:

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Name:

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Role:

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What support do you need, if any, to better serve students?

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Are there any barriers preventing you from supporting students? If so, what are those barriers?

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This optional resource can help you communicate how you are currently expected to spend your time.

Type of task (add or modify as needed)	For your role, what do you feel is the ideal allocation of time across different task types?	How are you currently being asked to allocate your time on a day-to-day basis?	What actions could be taken to move toward your ideal time allocation?
Assessment			
Scheduled student mental health support			
Non-scheduled student mental health support			
Other student and family care provision tasks			
Teacher and school staff support and training			
Counseling-related administrative activities			
Non-counseling duties			
Other			

# Resource to define potential staff roles to support student mental health



## Who is this tool for?

This Promising Practice is designed for district and school employees accountable for the time allocation of mental health support staff. Likely roles include members of the district or school's Student Services Department (e.g., the director of student support and health services manager) and district or school administrators (e.g., school principals).

Responsible staff can use the role description template to identify which tasks could be shifted to better utilize the experience, education, and training of employees providing mental health support.



## Steps for using this tool (*supporting materials follow*):

Use the [role description template](#) to complete the following exercises:

1. Document:
  - a. All tasks currently completed by school-based staff providing dedicated mental health support.
  - b. Other school-based staff roles that might be able to complete a subset of those tasks (with current training or with additional training and support).
2. Identify tasks you may want to reassign.
3. Set plans and identify the support you need to shift tasks to other roles.
  - a. Consider reviewing our glossary of mental health support training for non-clinician staff and students.

For each step, we will provide a role-description template completed by a school district.

**This tool describes potential actions and initiatives that may be governed by existing agreements in your district, including collective bargaining. When considering potential actions, understand how existing contracts and collective bargaining agreements impact what is or is not possible for particular groups of staff.**

**Instructions for documenting: (1) all tasks currently completed by school-based staff providing dedicated mental health support, and (2) other school-based staff that might be able to complete a subset of those tasks (with current training or with additional training and support)**

Please complete this exercise using the [role description template](#).

- 1. Document tasks currently performed by staff members providing dedicated mental health support.**
  - a. List all tasks **currently performed** by these staff members.
  - b. Where possible, categorize these tasks by theme (e.g., direct student services, training teachers or staff).
- 2. Where relevant, list any other mental health support tasks that are needed in your district.**
  - a. Consider reviewing the example from a major school district (below). You could also consider reviewing Chiefs for Change's [District Student Wellbeing Services Reflection Tool](#) for additional suggestions.
- 3. Where relevant, categorize the listed tasks to match the school or district's priorities for supporting students.**
  - a. Consider breaking down the tasks by the type of service provided (e.g., direct mental health support to students, other care provision tasks, training) and grouping tasks with similar priority levels for the school or district.
- 4. For each task, indicate whether the role:**
  - a. Generally **has the skills to complete this task** as a result of certification or credentials.
  - b. **Could not** complete this task, even with additional training provided by the district.
  - c. Could be **qualified to complete this task with additional training provided by the district**. (Review the [glossary](#) of mental health support trainings for staff and students for potential trainings.)



## Example from a major school district

Task category	Task description	LCSW	Counselor	Administrator/ para-professional	Teacher
Assessment	Screening				
	Psychological assessment				
	Threat assessment				
Scheduled student mental health support	Scheduled Tier 3 support provision				
	Scheduled Tier 2 support provision				
	Scheduled Tier 1 support provision				
Non-scheduled student mental health support	Non-scheduled non-acute support to students (e.g., 20-minute conversation with student who drops in)				
	Crisis intervention				
Other student and family care provision tasks	Connection of students or families to external or internal resources (e.g., community resources)				
	Referral, identification, and/or provision of services for special populations such as those eligible under foster care and other services				
	Proactive family engagement (including organizing family events and individual family outreach)				
	Procurement and provision of physical goods directly to students and families (e.g., food, school supplies, clothing)				
Teacher and school staff support and training	Formal training of teachers and school staff (development and delivery of training for teachers and school staff)				
	Coaching and support of teachers and school staff (e.g., attending teacher PLCs to provide advice and support)				

Generally has these skills as a result of certification/credentialing

Could develop these skills with additional training

Task category	Task description	LCSW	Counselor	Administrator/ para-professional	Teacher
<b>Counseling-related administrative activities</b>	Program management	☑	☑	☑	
	Community partnership engagement	☑	☑	☑	
	Counseling-related administrative duties	☑	☑	☑	
<b>Non-counseling duties</b>	Non-counseling duties (e.g., master scheduling, data entry, other miscellaneous school initiatives)	☑	☑	☑	☑

☑ Generally has these skills as a result of certification/credentialing

☑ Could develop these skills with additional training

## Role description template

Please use the following role description template to complete the exercises in this document. Consider including tasks from the examples that are relevant for your district, and additional tasks, where appropriate.

Tasks		Do staff have the skills to complete this task, as a result of certification or training? (Please add additional roles, where needed, e.g., school psychologist, school nurse, other support staff.)								
Task category (Example)	Task description (Example)	Licensed clinical provider (e.g., LCSW)	Other counselor or social worker	School counselor	Family engagement specialist	Administrator	Para-professional	Teacher		
		*** Not currently, but could do so with additional training through the district								
<i>Scheduled support</i>	<i>Scheduled Tier 2 support provision</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> ***	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> ***	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> ***	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> ***	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> ***	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> ***	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> ***	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> ***	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> ***
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## Instructions for identifying tasks you may want to reassign to other roles, and what plans and support must be in place to do so

*Please complete this exercise using the role description template.*

- 1. Identify the most capacity-constrained staff providing dedicated mental health support.**
  - a. Identify the staff who are most capacity constrained given the needs of your student body.
- 2. Identify the tasks that are a district or school priority for the capacity-constrained staff to focus their time on doing.**
  - b. Generally, these will be the tasks that they are uniquely qualified or licensed to perform and that are beneficial to the most in-need students.
- 3. Identify non-priority tasks currently performed by capacity-constrained staff that could be shifted.**
  - c. Tasks could be reassigned to other staff who are qualified to perform the tasks or to staff that could become qualified (e.g., through additional training).

**Reminder: This tool describes potential actions and initiatives that may be governed by existing agreements in your district, including collective bargaining. When considering potential actions, understand how existing contracts and collective bargaining agreements impact what is or is not possible for particular groups of staff.**

## Example of how a major school district defined staff roles (1/2)

Task category	Task description	LCSW	Counselor	Administrator/ para-professional	Teacher
Assessment	Screening	✓	✓		
	Psychological assessment	✓	✓		
	Threat assessment	✓	✓		
Scheduled student mental health support	Scheduled Tier 3 support provision	✓	✓		
	Scheduled Tier 2 support provision	✓	✓		
	Scheduled Tier 1 support provision	✓	✓		✓
Non-scheduled student mental health support	Non-scheduled non-acute support to students (e.g., 20-minute conversation with student who drops in)	✓	✓		✓
	Crisis intervention	✓	✓		✓
Other student and family care provision tasks	Connection of students or families to external or internal resources (e.g., community resources)	✓	✓		✓
	Referral, identification, and/or provision of services for special populations such as those eligible under foster care and other services	✓	✓		✓
	Proactive family engagement (including organizing family events and individual family outreach)	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Procurement and provision of physical goods directly to students and families (e.g., food, school supplies, clothing)	✓	✓	✓	✓

- ✓ Generally has these skills as a result of certification/credentialing
- ✓ Could develop these skills with additional training

Priority tasks

Tasks to shift

Capacity-constrained staff

This district prioritized hiring/training administrators and para-professionals to manage shifted tasks.

## Example of how a major school district defined staff roles (2/2)

Task category	Task description	LCSW	Counselor	Administrator/ para-professional	Teacher
Teacher and school staff support and training	Formal training of teachers and school staff (development and delivery of training for teachers and school staff)	✓	✓		
	Coaching and support of teachers and school staff (e.g., attending teacher PLCs to provide advice and support)	✓	✓		✓
Counseling-related administrative activities	Program management	✓	✓	✓	
	Community partnership engagement	✓	✓	✓	
	Counseling-related administrative duties	✓	✓	✓	
Non-counseling duties	Non-counseling duties (e.g., master scheduling, data entry, other miscellaneous school initiatives)	✓	✓	✓	✓

✓ Generally has these skills as a result of certification/credentialing

✓ Could develop these skills with additional training

Priority tasks

Tasks to shift

Capacity-constrained staff

This district prioritized hiring/training administrators and para-professionals to manage shifted tasks.

## Set plans and identify the support you need to shift tasks to other roles

In this exercise, you will decide what roles will be responsible for the shifted tasks. As necessary, set plans to shift tasks to other qualified staff, train current staff, and/or hire new staff qualified to manage the shifted tasks.

*Note: Staff receiving new tasks may benefit from a reduction in workload on other assignments.*

<b>What tasks will be shifted?</b>	<i>Example: Proactive family engagement</i>					
<b>What role(s) will do the shifted tasks?</b>	<i>Para-professionals</i>					
<b>When will responsibility for this task shift?</b>	<i>Start of next school year</i>					
<b>How will this shift be communicated to affected employees? With parents (where relevant)?</b>	<i>Employees informed in summer PD.</i>					
<b>Will existing staff manage the shifted tasks or will hiring be required? Who is responsible for hiring?</b>	<i>Hiring required. Vice principal is responsible.</i>					
<b>Will staff be qualified to do the shifted tasks or will training be needed? Who is responsible for training?</b>	<i>Training needed. School mental health lead is responsible.</i>					
<b>What other steps or resources are needed to make this shift successful?</b>						

## Glossary of mental health support training for non-clinician staff and students

*Non-exhaustive, exemplary list of trainings for districts to consider.*

Who is the training for?	List of trainings
<b>Teachers</b>	<a href="#">Youth Mental Health First Aid</a> <a href="#">NCTSN Core Curriculum on Childhood Trauma</a> <a href="#">Classroom Wise Mental Health Literacy Training</a> <a href="#">School Mental Health Teachers Training Guide</a> <a href="#">Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training</a>
<b>District health staff</b>	<a href="#">Mental Health Training Intervention for Health Providers in Schools</a> <a href="#">Mental Health and Trauma Training for School Nurses</a> <a href="#">Nursing and Mental Health in Video</a> <a href="#">Mental Health in Schools: New Roles for School Nurses</a>
<b>General staff</b>	<a href="#">Youth Mental Health First Aid</a> <a href="#">NCTSN Core Curriculum on Childhood Trauma</a> <a href="#">Edge Foundation In-School Coaching Training</a> <a href="#">Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training</a> <a href="#">UMatter for Schools Suicide Prevention Training</a>
<b>Students (to become peer supports)</b>	<a href="#">Peer Group Connection program</a> <a href="#">Active Minds Peer-Powered Mental Health Curriculum for High Schools</a> <a href="#">Sources of Strength suicide prevention program</a>



# Check-in action item tracker

If you are unable to use the [Google Sheets-based tracker tool](#), consider using this paper version to create detailed plans and track progress of actions from the regular check-ins. As time passes, you may need to print additional sheets to document new actions.

Item creation date	Action item	Progress tracker	Who is responsible?	When will it be done?
<i>Insert the date the action item was created</i>	<i>Write a brief description of the action to be completed</i>	<i>In pencil, write the action's status (not started, in progress, blocked or behind schedule, abandoned, completed)</i>	<i>Write down the name of the person responsible for completing this action</i>	<i>Write down the deadline for completing this action</i>
5-19-2022	Take the social workers off lunch duty so they can meet with students during lunch hours	In progress	John Smith	6-15-2022

Item creation date	Action item	Progress tracker	Who is responsible?	When will it be done?
<i>Insert the date the action item was created</i>	<i>Write a brief description of the action to be completed</i>	<i>In pencil, write the action's status (not started, in progress, blocked or behind schedule, abandoned, completed)</i>	<i>Write down the name of the person responsible for completing this action</i>	<i>Write down the deadline for completing this action</i>