Schools are a key component of the United States’ pediatric public health response. The insights of specialized instructional support personnel (SISP) can streamline and improve student health and academic programs.

The American Federation of Teachers believes in wraparound services for the whole child. The “whole child” approach recognizes that children’s social and emotional well-being influences brain development, and that “learning is social, emotional and academic.”

As AFT preK-12 affiliates advance thoughtful visions that address children’s health and well-being, districts face increasing demand to staff what the Every Student Succeeds Act calls specialized instructional support personnel, including:

- Behavioral analysts and intervention specialists;
- Occupational and physical therapists;
- School counselors;
- School nurses;
- School psychologists;
- School social workers; and
- Speech language pathologists and audiologists.

The AFT supports preK-12 affiliates to promote children’s well-being by elevating the unique expertise of SISP. One crucial step forward is to communicate the powerful potential of these educators for the full school community.
Categories of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel

Behavioral Analysts and Intervention Specialists

Behavioral analysts and intervention specialists provide behavioral supports for students and support re-entry into the classroom by assisting students in assessing their behavior.

Occupational Therapists and Physical Therapists

Occupational therapists and physical therapists use expertise in physical activity and environmental analysis to increase participation of all children in day-to-day school tasks. They assess, design plans and coordinate interventions to help students achieve developmental milestones and independently perform tasks such as using a wheelchair; using tools, like crayons; playing with toys; and getting dressed.
School Nurses

School nurses comprehensively prevent and address student health challenges, including those that may interfere with learning. School nurses manage medication administration and chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes and seizures. They conduct screenings and daily assessments, such as for hearing, vision, immunization compliance and eligibility for individualized education programs. School nurses also collaborate with school staff, students’ families and community members to keep students safe, healthy and ready to learn, such as by co-teaching health topics. School nurses help districts save economically and increase student access to higher-quality health services.6

School Counselors

School counselors work directly with students and families to support mental wellness through classroom lessons for students, evidence-based small-group counseling and individual counseling. Counselors also assist in the coordination of post-treatment plans for students and refer them for school or community-based mental health support.
School Psychologists

School psychologists apply expertise in mental health, learning, and behavior to help young people succeed academically, socially, behaviorally and emotionally. They conduct psychoeducational evaluation, coordinate crisis intervention, offer counseling and consult with families and teachers. In partnership with others in the school community, school psychologists create safe, healthy and supportive learning environments.

School Social Workers

School social workers have special expertise in family and community systems. They link students and their families with community services essential to student success.
Endnotes


Speech language pathologists and audiologists build students’ literacy and communication skills by addressing challenges with language processing, articulation and cognition. These specialists determine students’ eligibility for individualized education programs, implement IEPs and learning plans, counsel families and collaborate in tiered intervention models.