



*A Union of Professionals*

# Centering Student Well-Being

## Union Strategies to Uplift Specialized Instructional Support Personnel

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### Specialized Instructional Support Personnel

**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.”<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> 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<sup>5</sup> 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.

“Schools are essential to the nation’s well-being. Specialized instructional support personnel are at the forefront of articulating powerful visions of public health in 21st-century schools.”

—Randi Weingarten,  
AFT president

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 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 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.<sup>6</sup>



## **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.



## Speech Language Pathologists and Audiologists

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.

### Endnotes

- 1 Osher, D., Cantor, P., Berg, J., Steyer, L., and Rose, T. (2018). Drivers of Human Development: How Relationships and Context Shape Learning and Development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24:1, 6-36. DOI: 10.1080/10888691.2017.1398650.
- 2 Cantor, P., Osher, D., Berg, J., Steyer, L., and Rose, T. (2019). Malleability, Plasticity, and Individuality: How Children Learn and Develop in Context, *Applied Developmental Science*, 23:4, 307-337, DOI: 10.1080/10888691.2017.1398649.
- 3 Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., and Osher, D. (2020). Implications for Educational Practice of the Science of Learning and Development, *Applied Developmental Science*, 24:2, 97-140, DOI: 10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791.
- 4 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021). Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) Model. [Webpage.] Accessed March 29, 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wsc/index.htm>.
- 5 Every Student Succeeds Act, 20 U.S.C. § 6301 (2015). <https://www.congress.gov/bills/114th-congress/senate-bill/1177>.
- 6 Baisch, M., Lundeen, L., & Murphy, M. (2011). Evidence-based research on the value of school nurses in an urban school system. *Journal of School Health*, 81(2), 74-80.

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The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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