



## Utilizing Specialized Instructional Support Personnel to Improve Outcomes for All Students

The National Alliance of Pupil Services Organizations (NAPSO) is a coalition of national professional organizations whose members provide and support a variety of school-based prevention and intervention services to assist students in becoming effective learners and productive citizens.

NAPSO organizations represent over a million members, including school counselors, school nurses, psychologists, school psychologists, social workers and school social workers; occupational therapists, physical therapists, art therapists, dance/movement therapists, and music therapists; speech-language pathologists and audiologists; teachers, students, parents, and administrators.

NAPSO promotes interdisciplinary practice and collaboration and advocates for ensuring access to quality pupil services for all students. NAPSO member organizations are bound together by our common vision to bring all students, in all states, the programs and professional support services they need to ensure success in school.

### **Recommendations for Change:**

NAPSO has developed a set of legislative recommendations for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to ensure that "specialized instructional support personnel" are available to assist students and educators in addressing barriers to learning. **Note:** Comprehensive recommendations are available at [www.napso.org](http://www.napso.org).

**I. Adopt the term "Specialized Instructional Support Personnel" in the ESEA and the IDEA.** First and foremost, the terminology of "specialized instructional support personnel" should be adopted in both the ESEA and in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), acknowledging that "pupil services providers" in the ESEA and "related services providers" in the IDEA are the same team of professionals. *This team of professionals brings specialized skills that support instruction to improve school outcomes for every student.* These vital services are focused on prevention and intervention activities that promote effective classroom teaching and learning. Specialized instructional support personnel work collaboratively with teachers, administrators, and other school staff to ensure that students receive high quality instruction that is responsive to the diverse array of students' learning and developmental needs and challenges.

The U.S. Department of Education consistently has interpreted, through the IDEA regulations, that the list of "related services personnel" is not exhaustive. Since the IDEA definition is incorporated by reference into the ESEA definition of "Pupil Services," this interpretation also should be incorporated explicitly into the ESEA. Specifically, if students require the services of other therapists or service providers to assist them to be successful in school, school districts, within reason, must provide those services.



## **II. Establish an Office of Specialized Instructional Support Services within the U.S. Department of Education.**

**This Office would provide leadership within the Department of Education for specialized instructional support personnel.** This leadership would bring a “voice to the table” about the specialized instructional support programs and services that assist struggling students by removing barriers to learning.

In order to achieve the goal of ESEA to help all children to succeed, we must increase our attention on how to assist struggling learners and students at risk for school failure. The services provided by specialized instructional support personnel are essential in this effort as they provide direct support to these students.

### **The Office would also create a leadership system that is similar in structure to many local school districts and state education agencies.**

- Many local school districts and state education agencies currently have "pupil services" directors or profession-specific consultants or coordinators (i.e., school counseling directors, school psychologist supervisors, etc.) that plan, supervise and direct the activities of specialized instructional support personnel. These professionals help the educational agencies focus on the supports needed for struggling learners or students at risk for school failure.
- The absence of this leadership at the national level compromises the ability of local and state educational agencies to promote these programs that have proven to be effective with the most difficult learners.

### **The Office would improve cross-agency coordination of services and programs supporting struggling learners and students at risk.**

- *Creating this office would facilitate the development of a comprehensive, child-focused, multifaceted, and cohesive system of learning supports.*
- A goal of this office would be to provide the leadership needed to improve cross-agency coordination of programs (SAMHSA, DOJ, HRSA and DOE), reduce gaps and inefficient redundancies in support services, streamline systems, and simplify and improve the understanding and participation of parents in their child’s comprehensive educational program.
- The absence of leadership at the federal level limits the attention to these services and compromises the national communication and coordination of these services for all students in need.

Specialized instructional support personnel encompass a large number of staff categories with a broad set of responsibilities in schools. The disciplines included are as follows: school counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, and school social workers; occupational therapists, physical therapists, art therapists, dance/movement therapists, and music therapists; speech-language pathologists and audiologists. A number of State education agencies already provide leadership for specialized instructional support services by employing departments and/or coordinators for all or various subsets of these professions.

The Assistant Secretaries for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services and for Elementary and Secondary Education currently have authority over these personnel through the IDEA and the ESEA. However, no specific point of contact – office or individual within the U.S. Department of Education – is assigned to administer, coordinate, or carry out programs and activities concerned with providing specialized instructional support services in schools or to work with State coordinators or with SEAs in general on issues related to specialized instructional support services.



## Organization

We envision that the Office of Specialized Instructional Support Services would be under the supervision of a Director of Specialized Instructional Support Services. Since the functions of the Office are trans-disciplinary and affect all students K-12, the Director should report directly to the Deputy Secretary of Education, whose office currently coordinates the work of the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), the Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII), the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA), the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), and the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS).

The Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools should be subsumed under the proposed office, as most of the programs in OSDFS currently are staffed at the local level by specialized instructional support personnel. Several programs in OII, e.g., School Dropout Prevention and Mental Health Integration in Schools, would also most logically be placed under the new office.

**III. Specialized instructional support personnel should be fully integrated into the general education system.** State and local education agency capacity should be increased to ensure integration of specialized instructional support personnel into the general education system. Other school personnel, including teachers and administrators, should be made aware of how to access and use the skills and knowledge of specialized instructional support personnel. Ultimately, increased school system capacity should define how specialized instructional support personnel coordinate and collaborate with other school personnel to ensure student success.

### NAPSO Member Organizations:

American Art Therapy Association  
American Counseling Association  
American Dance Therapy Association  
American Federation of Teachers  
American Music Therapy Association  
American Occupational Therapy Association  
American Psychological Association  
American Physical Therapy Association  
American School Counselor Association  
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association  
Council for Exceptional Children  
International Association of Pupil Personnel Workers  
National Association for College Admission Counseling  
National Association of Pupil Services Administrators  
National Association of School Nurses  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Association of State Directors of Special Education  
National Education Association  
School Social Work Association of America