



What's the Big IDEA? # 10

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. This series is designed to offer information about IDEA as amended in 2004. Each fact sheet will focus on a different aspect of IDEA.

Behavioral Health Services

In our IDEA fact sheet on related services (#9) we gave a brief overview of some of the specialists who may work with your child. In this fact sheet, we will give an overview of some of the professionals in the schools who work in the area of behavioral health. The services these specialists provide may be added as related services on your child's IEP if your child has a need for them.

School Psychologist – School psychologists have training in both psychology and education. They work with students, parents, and teachers to identify and eliminate obstacles to learning. They may also work in partnership with professionals in the community to provide services to students and their families outside of school. The school psychologist may have been the person who tested your child and discussed the evaluation results with you as part of the eligibility process.

School psychologists may be asked to consult with teachers and school staff about a particular student. He or she may also work directly with students – for example, teaching anger management, communication, and/or social skills. Or, he or she may design interventions for a student and then follow-up with classroom staff to review the results of the interventions.

School psychologists complete formal university training beyond a master's degree. They must be certified and/or licensed in the state where they practice. For more information about school psychologists, you may want to visit the website of The National Association of School Psychologists – www.nasponline.org



School Counselors – Counselors work with all students in the school, not just students who receive special education services. School counselors may provide individual counseling for students. They also may run special groups – such as friendship, bullying prevention, or divorce groups – to help several students who are dealing with similar issues.

Counselors take on different roles at different levels. Elementary school counselors focus on a mental health perspective. They may go into classrooms and teach skills such as positive decision making. High school counselors provide services aimed at helping students succeed academically and prepare for post-secondary life. They are involved in helping students make sure they are on track for graduation and they can assist students and parents with researching college options and navigating the college application process. In addition, they address issues affecting the safety and health of all students, such as substance abuse education. They provide individual counseling and crisis intervention and management when needed. They also may help create and support positive behavior support plans. School counselors must hold a master's degree and meet state licensure requirements.

School Social Workers – School social workers work directly with students and families. They are employed by the school district, not the state Children, Youth and Families Department. In order to receive the services of a school social worker, the student must demonstrate a need for services and the services must be written into the IEP.

School social workers offer support to both students and families so that students can be successful in the classroom. For example, they might do family counseling or help parents with parenting skills. If families need more extensive services, school social workers can serve as a link between the school, students, families, and community social services. They may offer individual or group counseling in the schools or at students' homes. School social workers may help to write and implement positive behavior support plans. Throughout their work with students at all grade levels – preschool through high school – school social workers focus on the many people and situations in a student's life that may impact his or her academic and functional performance.

School social workers must have a master's degree and a state license. For more information about school social workers, you may want to visit the website of the School Social Work Association of America – www.sswaa.org



Family Counselors – Family counselors provide therapy for the entire family. Since children may be negatively affected by problems in the family, family counselors concentrate on improving overall family functioning so students can be successful. Family counselors must meet the state licensure requirements.

School Nurses – In addition to addressing the physical needs of the students in the school, school nurses also identify and screen for behavioral health needs. School nurses work with all of the students at the school. School health services will be added to a student's IEP if there is a need for medications at school or if the child has any health conditions that need to be monitored at school.

Behavior Management Specialists (BMS) – These specialists work individually with students to assist them in learning and maintaining appropriate behavior. The BMS will work with school staff, parents, and the student to design positive behavioral supports. Together, they will develop a cohesive behavior management program that will work for the child at school and at home.

Schools may also contract with other behavioral health professionals. For example, the district may contract with an art therapist in order to provide services to a student based on his/her needs as documented in the IEP.

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