



Education Development Center, Inc.

Building
Collaboration for
Mental Health Services
in California Schools

In May 2007 Education Development Center (EDC) was awarded a contract from the California Department of Education (CDE) to work on enhancing collaboration between the schools and departments of mental health. The activities of the contract, "Building Collaboration for Mental Health Services in California Schools," are timed to coincide with the implementation of the Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) planning processes for the Mental Health and Services Act (MHSA.)

With approval of Proposition 63, now known as the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), California voters created opportunities for new funding and enhanced collaboration between public schools and California Department of Mental Health (DMH.) At this writing, DMH and a 16 member Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC) are finalizing guidelines for the PEI component of the MHSA. This presents an immediate opportunity for schools and mental health services in your county to expand interagency collaboration and fund sharing to provide mental health services to the age group served by schools (0 to 22.)

In each county, the Director of Mental Health Services has been charged to develop a local plan to utilize new MHSA funds for PEI, specifically for children and youth. The plans for counties with more than 200,000 residents must designate 51% of the budget for the priority age group (0 through 25); plans for all counties must be the result of community collaboration. School failure and dropout are two of the negative outcomes of untreated mental illness specifically named in new legislation. This planning process has already begun in counties throughout the state; we urge school officials to be actively involved in their communities' planning process.

Beginning in October of 2007 the EDC staff will facilitate regional meetings throughout California. The primary purpose of the meetings is to encourage interagency collaboration by bringing together decision-makers of school systems and mental health departments. Participation from District and County Offices of Education will improve local collaboration about providing services to children and youth that address goals shared by education services and mental health services. Those common goals are:

- Preventing school failure
- Preventing school drop out
- Reducing school suspensions and expulsions for behavior problems
- Early identification of and intervention for mental health needs
- Preventing the progression of mental illness that requires special education services

It is important that addressing mental health needs is not conceptualized as a task to be delegated exclusively to Special Education staff. Of equal importance are those school personnel who

- address poor academic achievement,
- are student study team members,
- provide counseling and guidance,
- identify students with behavior problems,
- have programs to prevent violence, and
- intervene with students who have poor attendance.

For information about the planning process in your county and/or if you are willing to assist in planning the meeting of mental health directors and school representatives in your region, please call or email EDC staff at the contact information below.

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