



School Based Behavioral Health Counseling Model

Sinnissippi Centers, Inc.

September 2022

Background: Research and experience tells us there are several potential barriers which prevent children and families from attending office based behavioral health counseling on a regular and consistent basis. Some parents are reluctant to bring their children to a mental health center due to stigma or other misperceptions. Other barriers may include transportation, parents' work schedules, and time the child spends out of school. Office schedules and limited late afternoon/evening hours for counselors may add to the challenge. As a result, some families discontinue office-based services prematurely interrupting the opportunity for successful treatment outcomes.

In September 2015, Sinnissippi Centers and Morrison CUSD #6, with funding from the Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation (ILCHC), partnered to bring behavioral health treatment services directly to the children and families of the Morrison CUSD #6 by placing a counselor in their schools several days a week. Implementation of this project was guided by the belief that there are many children enrolled in schools with significant emotional, social, and behavioral concerns who would benefit substantially from behavioral health services equivalent to services provided onsite at Sinnissippi's offices.

This model has been successfully implemented in other schools throughout the area including Sterling Middle and Elementary schools, Rock Falls Middle and Elementary schools, Dixon Middle and elementary schools, all Amboy schools, all Polo schools, Creston, Chadwick Milledgeville, Eastland, and Chana Education Center. Plans are proceeding to expand school based behavioral health counseling in several additional areas during academic year 22-23 including Fulton schools, Stillman Valley, Thome, Center for Change and St. Mary's in Sterling.

Model Components:

Referral Process:

- Referrals to the School Based behavioral health counselor are usually handled by the school counselors/social workers to ensure consent and billing expectations are clear to the family.
- A short referral form with key information and demographics may be completed by the school counselor and sent to the SCI counselor.
- A cost-free meeting can be offered to the student and parent/guardian to discuss concerns, the treatment model, and next steps.
- Parent/guardian consent will be obtained for services and financial information will be gathered. **It will be explained to the family that services are billed to available funding sources such as insurance and Medicaid, and that they may be responsible for any remaining costs or co-pays.**
- **If a family is unable to pay for services, the School Counselor and SCI BH counselor will seek additional options to ensure that no child left unserved due to financial limitations.**
- Services are voluntary and parents have the right to decline services.

Scheduling/Access:

- The School Based counselor will schedule their own appointments.
- Confidential office space is needed at each school location with a secretary/gatekeeper available to manage access and for assistance if needed.
- Students will be seen individually by the SB counselor who will respect classroom schedules; however, depending on urgency of need, counseling sessions may take priority.
- If parents join sessions, they will check in at the main school reception area and sign in when they arrive for appointments.
- The SB counselor can be available to stay after school hours to meet with parents/families, but this requires the availability of school support staff.
- Children and families may also be seen at an SCI Office for specific services.

Equipment/Technology:

- Capacity to link directly to the school's internet/wireless system with an SCI computer.
- Access to an onsite printer, phone, and some general supplies.
- If possible, access to a locked cabinet for confidential notes/papers.
- Treatment records will be housed at Sinnissippi Centers using SCI electronic health record.

Services:

- The school-based counselor will complete a full assessment and develop a treatment plan with the child/family to determine needs and goals for services.
- The SB counselor provides individual services to students but works to engage families whenever possible to participate in services in person, by phone, or video.
- Other services may include group services and linkage and consultation with school counselors/social workers and teachers.

School Schedule/Counselor Availability:

- During breaks and holidays when school staff are not onsite, the SB counselor can be available to meet with youth and families at alternate locations, if feasible, including other SCI office locations or by providing home visits.
- The SB counselor and school staff may collaboratively decide to provide access to families during breaks or during the summer.
- Throughout the year, late afternoon and early evening hours may be available also with the mutual agreement of the SB counselor and school staff.

A full schedule for the SB counselor is essential for the financial viability of the program, and a clear understanding of the distinction between school services and the services of the School Based counselor is critical. These are not school funded services but rather the co-location of a community resource housed at the school for enhanced access to services.

For more information, please contact: Gloria Martin, LCPC, Director, Child and Adolescent Services, April Ramirez, SB Supervisor, or Amy Drew, SB Supervisor

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