

NON-IEP COUNSELING GUIDELINES

This circular will remain in effect unless rescinded or superseded by a subsequent version

INTRODUCTION

Counseling services are provided to Boston Public School students in myriad formats and modalities. Students with and without disabilities may receive counseling services within Boston Public Schools. Students with disabilities may have IEPs that contain counseling as a related service mandating the frequency and duration of counseling. Non-disabled students without IEPs may be participating in counseling sessions formulated as a result of a recommendation of the Student Support Team in collaboration with staff from the Behavioral Health Services department. As a result of partnerships with external agencies, counseling also may be provided to BPS students by mental health providers who are not BPS employees.

With this document, the Boston Public Schools seeks to ensure a standard level of practice for the provision of counseling services so that consistent practices may be implemented in assisting students to overcome school-based issues which may be hindering their achievement.

All mental health providers must conform with the Standards for School-based Mental Health Services developed in partnership between BPS and members of the Boston School-Based

Behavioral Health Collaborative. These standards can be obtained on the Boston Public Schools website at <https://www.bostonpublicschools.org/domain/2443>.

BACKGROUND

The American Psychological Association has defined counseling as a process to help individuals towards overcoming obstacles to their personal growth, wherever these may be encountered and towards achieving development of their personal growth.

Massachusetts Department of Mental Health states further that mental health counselors render professional services to individuals, families, or groups. They apply principles, methods, and theories of counseling and psychotherapeutic techniques to define goals and develop a treatment plan of action aimed towards the prevention, treatment, and resolution of mental and emotional dysfunction.

The American Counseling Association states that “counselors encourage client growth and development in ways that foster the client’s interest and welfare; counselors avoid fostering dependent counseling relationships. The ACA states further that “counselors practice in specialty areas new to them *only* after appropriate education, training, and *supervised* experience. While developing new skills in specialty areas, counselors take steps to ensure the competence of their work and to protect others from possible harm.”

Boston Public Schools Counseling Work

In addition to these standard definitions and professional ethics of practice, all BPS and non-BPS providers should understand

and demonstrate that their counseling work should support teaching and learning goals and effective teaching practices. Ultimately, the goal of counseling is to support success within the classroom.

PRIOR TO COUNSELING

1. The Student Support Team serves as the hub of student services within the school. The Student Support Team facilitator should have knowledge of the referral for counseling, and the recommendation for counseling should emerge from the Student Support Team. When necessary, counseling referrals can also be made outside of the SST process.
2. The direct service provider designated to be the counseling provider should be clear about (1) the scope of the work requested in counseling, (2) the reason for the referral, and (3) the expected outcome in counseling. If unclear regarding the reason for counseling, a meeting should be scheduled between the counselor provider and the referring agent to discuss these concerns.
3. The direct service provider should counsel students regarding behaviors that impact teaching and learning, academic achievement, and daily school functioning.
4. Specific issues that are trauma related, i.e., physical and/or sexual abuse (onset being past or present), death and dying, and behaviors that may need psychiatric intervention and may necessitate a 51A Report, should be brought to the attention of the principal/head of school or the designated administrator and the direct service provider's supervisor. These issues should be referred to the appropriate

community counseling agency/mental health facility.

5. Written consent *must* be obtained from the student, parent, or legal guardian before beginning counseling (see attached consent form). If a student is receiving counseling through an outside provider, but in a BPS building, parent/guardian should also sign the agency specific consent form.
6. The direct service provider must outline goals and objectives for the individual student (see attached form). Furthermore, it is recommended that the direct service provider formulate the goals and objectives with input from the parent/legal guardian.
7. Parents/legal guardians should be informed that pertinent information regarding specific students may be discussed at the Student Support Team meetings. All ethical professional standards of confidentiality will be maintained regarding the specific nature of the counseling sessions(s).
8. All direct service providers should maintain professional, proper, safe, and appropriate safeguards for the student(s) and themselves.

COUNSELING PRACTICE

All direct service providers who are counseling students should:

- Have a consistent counseling schedule which is documented and provided to their principal/head of school, supervisor, and the needed personnel in the individual schools (i.e., teacher, OSS coordinator, Student Support coordinator, guidance counselor, and other school administrators).

- Meet in rooms that provide appropriate space and levels of confidentiality.
- Guarantee a measure of safety and protection for the student and provider, including consideration of the distance between a counselor and student and leaving the door ajar at all times.
- Not engage in any physical contact with the student(s) due to the possible risk of psychological harm to the student as a result of the physical contact (i.e., cradling, "touch therapy," caressing, massaging, and petting). This requirement of no physical contact is due to the possibility of psychological and/or physical harm to the student as a result of such contact.
- Document each session held and keep progress notes on each student. Provisions should be made for sharing themes of concern and critical information with the parent/legal guardian.
- Share specific information that relates to the student's academic progress with appropriate staff.
- Respond to inquiries from the principal/head of school regarding the student's progress in counseling.

TERMINATING COUNSELING SERVICES

When counseling goals and objectives have been reached and/or there have been several documented absences and/or instances of resistance by the student, as well as several documented attempts to provide counseling services, termination of counseling services may be appropriate. The direct service provider should:

1. Notify the student's parent or legal guardian.
2. Notify (in writing) appropriate school personnel (principal/head of school, Student Support coordinator, OSS coordinator, supervisor, teacher, or other school administrator).
3. Summarize progress and recommendation and follow-up as needed (this could be facilitated during the Student Support Team meeting, discussions within small learning communities, common planning time, and/or teacher parent conferences).

SUMMARY

Direct service providers, both BPS and non-BPS staff, are an integral component of helping students reach their fullest academic achievement. Lack of knowledge or misunderstanding of ethical and professional practice standards are not a defense against charges of unethical and/or inappropriate practice conduct. It is important that these practice standards are maintained and adhered to for the safety of students and the direct service provider. These practice standards ensure a safe, protected, and ethical delivery of service for both students and the staff members who serve them. If it is determined that these guidelines have not been followed and/or that inappropriate, unethical and/or unprofessional conduct has occurred, Boston Public Schools will take any such action as is appropriate under the circumstances. Such action may range from discipline to termination from employment or termination of any contract with Boston Public Schools as BPS deems appropriate under the circumstances.

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Mary Skipper, Superintendent

CONSENT FOR SCHOOL-BASED NON-IEP COUNSELING SERVICES

I, _____
(Print Name of Parent/Legal Guardian)

have been provided with the reason (s) my child,

(Print Child's Name)

has been recommended for school-based counseling services.
The reason (s) for the recommended school-based counseling
services are:

I give consent for _____
(school name) to refer my child for the following school-based
counseling services (check all that are applied). I understand that
these services may be provided by a community mental health
agency in partnership with the school.

- ☐ Individual Counseling
- ☐ Group Counseling

BPS Staff Member: _____
(Insert staff name)

Outside Agency staff:

(Insert staff name)

I also give consent for the school to release my child's student record, health, and other confidential information to the school-based counseling service provider and for my child to participate in these school-based counseling services.

I understand that my participation in my child's school-based counseling services will be appreciated and strongly encouraged. I have read this Consent for School-Based Counseling Services and understand its terms. I sign it voluntarily and with full knowledge of its significance.

Parent/Legal Guardian Signature

Date