

REGULATION MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Related Entries: IOG-RA, JHE-RA, COB-RA
Responsible Office: Deputy Superintendent of Schools

Mental Health Referrals

I. PURPOSE

To outline the roles, responsibilities, and procedures for providing mental health services to Montgomery County Public Schools' (MCPS) students exhibiting mental health, behavioral, or emotional issues that may be interfering with school performance.

II. MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE PROVIDERS

Mental health professionals include Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) certified staff, school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers, pupil personnel workers, psychiatrists, and psychiatric nurses.

III. BACKGROUND

This regulation delineates the steps for referral to internal MCPS mental health resources, articulates the roles and responsibilities of MCPS staff relative to mental health referrals, suggests best practices for mental health service provision and intervention planning, and establishes guidelines if referral of students to non-MCPS mental health resources is deemed necessary and appropriate.

When a student demonstrates behaviors that compromise his or her school performance and may need services to support appropriate classroom behavior, school personnel should refer the student to Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) or the Educational Management Team (EMT) for problem solving or support.

In some situations, the intensity and frequency of the mental health issue may require immediate action and should not be delayed by referral to school problem-solving teams. For example, suicidal gestures or ideation, suspected drug use, or other serious threats to self and/or others require immediate intervention and reporting. The school administrator, counselor, and/or school psychologist should be consulted to determine when immediate action is appropriate. In these instances MCPS Regulation COB-RA, *Reporting a Serious Incident*, and/or MCPS Form 335-54, *Suicide Risk Reporting Form*, should be used.

The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004* (IDEA) requires that students identified as disabled be provided free and appropriate educational programs and related services. The law stipulates that related services are to be provided when necessary for students to achieve their Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and objectives. Direct and indirect mental health services can be provided as a related service by MCPS staff assigned to the school (psychologist, social worker, or school counselor). These related services are to be included on the student's IEP.

IV. ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND PROCEDURES

The following section outlines the responsibilities of staff members and problem-solving teams in identifying or referring students who may require mental health services.

A. Teacher Roles and Responsibilities

Teachers are often the first to identify student behaviors that may require support from mental health professionals. Teachers can discuss school experiences and describe behavior to parents or guardians, but may not recommend professional intervention. Teachers are not qualified to diagnose behavior disorders or to undertake the sensitive task of making parents aware of possible mental health problems. School staff members have access to MCPS mental health professionals who are certified, uniquely qualified, and knowledgeable about behavior/adjustment problems. These professionals should be consulted in order to determine whether the identified behavior(s) is—

1. associated with a mental health problem that is in need of immediate attention, or
2. associated with other factors, such as academic frustration.

In the event of suicidal ideation, the teacher reports immediately to the counselor or principal. If the situation warrants a mental health referral, the mental health professional would discuss the referral with the parents or guardians.

Before referral for mental health services, the following items need to be documented: onset of the problem behavior, triggering events, frequency of the behavior, intensity of the behavior, duration of the behavior, and interventions tried.

B. Administrator Roles and Responsibilities

The administrator's role is to determine if immediate action is needed (as in suspicion of suicidal behavior) by consulting with appropriate mental health staff members. If such a determination is made, appropriate steps are taken and documented.

If immediate action is not deemed to be necessary, the administrator facilitates—

1. consultation between school staff, appropriate specialists, and parents or guardians, when indicated, to discuss the student's behavior or school adjustment problems;
2. problem solving and effective interventions in the classroom;
3. CPS/EMT referral and approaches; and
4. the participation of key staff members with skill and knowledge in the areas of social, emotional, or behavioral problems who are participating with the CPS/EMT.

C. CPS/EMT Roles and Responsibilities

The CPS/EMT considers mental health referrals and investigates whether problem-solving and intervention plans are appropriate. This process will include—

1. defining the behavior in observable and measurable terms;
2. implementing an evidence-based intervention directly linked to why the behavior is occurring;
3. monitoring consistent implementation of the plan and evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention; and
4. ensuring that procedures for documenting parent contacts and record keeping are followed.

When, in spite of best efforts, the student's behaviors continue to impact his/her performance, school teams may then suspect that the student is emotionally impaired. When emotional disturbance is suspected, the school team is to implement IDEA screening procedures for confirming emotional disturbance.

If the outcome of the screening procedures is confirmation that the student qualifies for special education services, the IEP team will determine goals and objectives and recommend special education services.

If the outcome of the screening procedures is a determination that a student does not qualify for special education services, the IEP team will refer the student to the school's EMT to implement and monitor individualized interventions.

D. MCPS Mental Health Professional Roles and Responsibilities

The critical role of the mental health professional is to provide consultation and help determine if immediate action must be taken. To facilitate this determination, MCPS mental health professionals may engage in behavioral observations, implement student interview techniques, and/or conduct direct counseling approaches.

In some situations, it may be determined that the student's problem is not related to in-school factors, but behavior, health, and emotional issues are still affecting school performance.

MCPS mental health professionals and school administrators can inform the family of services available to them through the Montgomery County Crisis Center and/or other Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services programs, provide parents with a listing of community mental health referral sources without recommending specific providers, and inquire if the family has a trusted medical professional and, if so, recommend that they consult with that professional.

E. Non-MCPS Mental Health Professionals

On occasion, parents invite non-MCPS mental health service providers to participate with school staff to recommend best practices. In these situations, the non-MCPS mental health service provider can provide the following for consideration:

1. Mental health expertise and perspective
2. Appropriate evidence-based educational and/or behavioral interventions

In addition, non-MCPS mental health professionals can provide input to school teams as needed in the development, monitoring, and evaluation of interventions; provide information to MCPS teams when outside services have been initiated; or act as a liaison to community mental health service providers and MCPS.

V. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES – SUICIDE

The Maryland Court of Appeals ruled in October 1991 that all school staff members have a “duty to use reasonable means to attempt to prevent a suicide when they are on notice of a child or adolescent student’s suicidal intent.” Staff members are required to notify parents or guardians of any suicide threat, including secondhand information, even when the student denies the threat. In these instances, school staff should immediately confer with a school administrator, school counselor, or school psychologist, and MCPS Form 335-54, *Suicide Risk Reporting Form*, should be completed.

Regulation History: New Regulation, October 1982, revised July 21, 1987, revised October 25, 2007; revised August 13, 2009.