**Supporting New Specialized Instructional Support Personnel**

**Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISPs)** include school counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses, among other qualified professional personnel providing “necessary services.” *– Every Student Succeeds Act (Sec. 8002, 47 (A)).*

The [2017 Statewide Induction and Mentoring Report](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeffectiveness/mentor/reports.html) found that most districts provide induction and mentoring to SISPs, but on average these supports are not as extensive or formalized for SISPs as they are for teachers. While districts are not required to provide mentors to SISPs, doing so can enhance a school team’s effectiveness.

In the 2016 and 2017 Induction and Mentoring Reports, districts reported that they aimed to institute or improve induction for new Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISPs). The following guidance describes topics and steps that leaders should prioritize when planning supports for new SISPs. The guidance was developed through a review of the Induction and Mentoring Survey responses and through interviews with professional organizations representing SISPs in Massachusetts.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Understand SISPs’ diverse roles and backgrounds; set clear expectations**

SISPs with the same job title often fill a range of roles. For example, one school psychologist may serve as a special education team chair, while another focuses primarily on psychological assessment. Thus, clear job descriptions for SISPs are essential.

 SISPs also come from a variety of preparation and prior experiences. For example, school social workers may have different training backgrounds, such as Master’s in Social Work or Licensed Mental Health Counselors. The school system where SISPs previously worked or interned may have functioned very differently. Therefore, new SISPs can contribute new ideas, but also need a clear introduction to the school system. Be prepared to adapt induction supports based on the function a SISP will play in the district, and on whether it aligns with the SISP’s prior professional roles.

Other SISPs come from work in non-school settings, such as school nurses, who bring experience from diverse healthcare settings. In this situation, SISPs may be accustomed to working alongside role-alike colleagues, and being the only person in the building with a given role can be an isolating experience. Leaders should orient SISPs to working in a school and integrate them into school-wide work.

Due to the variability of functions and prior experiences, schools should be explicit about expectations of new-to-district SISPs. Leaders must set clear expectations from day one, especially because SISPs are often called on to handle crises. Compared to teachers, SISPs’ schedules and workloads may not be clear-cut, so newer SISPs need clear expectations regarding scheduling and time management, to avoid being overwhelmed. For example, districts could provide a checklist of roles and duties.

**Make SISPs a part of the school and district team**

*“There are so many great things [counselors and principals] can do together… Include us in the conversation. Include us in the district plan.”*

*-* Ruth Carrigan, Massachusetts School Counselors Association President

A SISP is often the only one in the building or district who does, or perhaps even understands, his or her particular job. This can pose a barrier to learning to navigate a school system and culture–a process that is especially crucial for SISPs, who need to know how to work with colleagues in diverse roles. School leaders sometimes neglect to orient SISPs to school culture and dynamics, including where to go for information and resources. In small districts, there may be only one person with a specific SISP role in the district. On the other hand, if a school culture is not collaborative, a SISP can feel isolated even in a large district.

As a starting point, leaders can reduce isolation by regularly checking in with new SISPs and engaging them in school-wide work. Schools can benefit from including SISPs on relevant teams–such as student support, Response to Intervention, or bullying–and from otherwise including them in meaningful plans and conversations. This way, principals can understand what SISPs can “bring to the table.” For example, a nurse may have a unique insight into a student’s home life. When a SISP is included as an integral part of a school team, leaders should demonstrably value SISPs’ contributions. An induction program promoting thoughtful professional growth and collaboration demonstrates recognition of SISPs’ important work.

**Provide formal & informal opportunities for mentoring & networking**

**Finding formal and informal mentors:** Beyond orienting new SISPs to their roles, mentors can promote self-advocacy and time-management, which are necessary for learning to navigate a new school system. Induction and mentoring reports indicate that districts often struggle to match mentors and mentees. This matchmaking process faces particular obstacles for SISPs, particularly in small districts that may not have a veteran in the same role. In the 2017 Induction and Mentoring Report, nearly half of districts reported challenges in finding enough mentors for SISPs. Nevertheless, 59 percent of districts indicated that SISPs are always paired with a role-alike mentor, and 37 percent said they sometimes are.

Districts may turn to out-of-district SISPs to serve as mentors–in which case the mentee may need both a role-alike mentor *and* a local mentor. In such a case, the mentors can split the mentoring work, as well as a stipend. Nearby districts, professional organizations, or collaboratives can assist in finding mentors.

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| Role-alike mentor | In-school/district mentor |
| * May work in another district, such as a neighboring district or one that shares an educational collaborative
* Holds not only the same title, but also the same *function*
* Knows relevant skills, knowledge, & regulations
* Provides additional supervision required

for novices in some fields* May communicate virtually
 | * Orients mentee to school culture, procedures, resources & colleagues
* Offers building-wide perspective on how school system operates
* May hold a similar role (i.e. matching a counselor with a psychologist)
* Serves as a formal mentor if the mentee has an *informal* role-alike mentor in another district
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**Building a structured mentoring program:** While new SISPs may have informal peer mentors, they also need formal mentors. Mentoring duties should be built into, and protected as, part of the mentor’s official workload and schedule. If a district doesn’t have a designated SISP to oversee mentoring relationships, it can leverage a veteran SISP to serve as a mentor coordinator.

Well-structured programs require funding, which many districts find in their Title II, Part A allocations. Long-term retention of educators, which begins with quality induction, prevents the costs of teacher turnover. For example, districts spend thousands of dollars to replace the average exiting teacher.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Supporting networks:** Beyond one-on-one mentoring, new SISPs can benefit from role-alike networks across schools and districts. Encouraging meetings with role-alike colleagues should be a priority, as it reduces isolation and allows professional development. Participation in professional organizations also allows SISPs to network with peers across districts. Networking not only offers informal guidance from experienced peers, but also insight into resources and PD opportunities.

**Differentiate training by role**

Though districts often offer PD targeted to teachers, they can leverage existing PD offerings to benefit SISPs’ work. Engaging SISPs for their input can make PD more relevant. If offering the same training for all educators, districts can allow staff to choose the topic/s relevant to their role; school psychologists might choose a special education training, for example. New SISPs and teachers do need development in some of the same areas. For example, SISPs also need to understand how to work with English learners and accommodate diverse cultures.

Districts can offer parallel, role-specific training, perhaps led by veteran SISPs and/or in collaboration with other districts. Online trainings for SISPs allow for more flexible schedules. SISPs should also receive role-specific training from mentors, grounded in daily work. For social workers, going over a case study together can be a springboard for conversation and reflection.

**Explore suggested resources for SISPs and administrators supporting new SISPs**

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| For school psychologists |
| * National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) [Guidance for Postgraduate Mentorship and Professional Support](https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Standards%20and%20Certification/Certification/Guidance_Postgraduate_Mentorship.pdf)
* NASP [Find-a-Mentor Program](https://www.nasponline.org/membership-and-community/get-involved/find-a-mentor-program)
* Massachusetts School Psychologists Association (MSPA) [contact information](https://mspa.wildapricot.org/Contact-Us) and [Professional Development](https://mspa.wildapricot.org/Professional-Development)
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| For school social workers |
| * The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) – MA Chapter hosts a Google group forum for licensed social workers to share ideas and questions; contact jgoldenberg.naswma@socialworkers.org for more information
* The NASW - MA School Social Work Shared Interest Group contact: Chapter@naswma.org
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| For school nurses |
| * The MA Dept. of Public Health [School Health Services](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/community-health/primarycare-healthaccess/school-health/about/) offers regional advisers that support school nurses
* The MA School Nurse Organization contact: president@msno.org
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| For school counselors |
| * Mentors and mentees can go through the MA School Counselors Association (MASCA) [MA Model for School Counselors](https://masca.wildapricot.org/resources/Documents/MA%20Model%202.0/MA%20Model%202.0%20FINAL%20DRAFT%202017%20-%20ABSOLUTE%20FINAL%20AGREED.pdf) together
* MASCA contact: president@masca.org
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| All SISP mentors and mentees can also consult:* Educator Evaluation [rubrics](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/resources/rubrics/) for SISPs
* state/national organization for their SISP role (i.e. American School Counseling Association)
* state governing body for their profession (i.e. Health and Human Services for nurses)
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1. Content based on interviews with representatives from the following professional organizations: Massachusetts School Counselors Association (Ruth Carrigan, President); National Association of Social Workers–Massachusetts (Jennifer Orcutt, Co-chair of the School Social Work Shared Interest Group); Massachusetts School Psychologists Association (Kristine Camacho, President; Bob Lichtenstein, Chieh Li, Barbara Miller); and Massachusetts School Nurses Association (Carilyn Rains, Past President); also with the Massachusetts Dept. of Public Health (Mary Gapinski, Director of School Health) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A National Commission for Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) study found the cost of recruiting, hiring and training a replacement teacher ranges from about $4,400 in a rural district to more than $17,000 in a large urban district. NCTAF (2007). The High Cost of Teacher Turnover. <https://nctaf.org/wp-content/uploads/NCTAFCostofTeacherTurnoverpolicybrief.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)