



## **Establish an Office of Specialized Instructional Support Services in the U.S. Department of Education**

*NAPSO urges Congress, under the ESEA, to direct the Secretary of Education to establish an Office of Specialized Instructional Support Services, under the direct supervision of the Deputy Secretary of Education, and to appoint a director and appropriate staff.*

### **Rationale:**

1. **Provide leadership within the Department of Education for specialized instructional support personnel (currently known as pupil services in ESEA and related services in IDEA), programs, and services.**
  - This leadership would bring a “voice to the table” about the specialized instructional support programs and services that assist struggling learners and remove barriers to learning.
  - In order to achieve NCLB’s goal of all children achieving proficiency by 2014, we must increase our attention on how to assist struggling learners and students at risk for school failure. The services provided by specialized instructional support personnel are essential in this effort as they provide direct support to these students.
  
2. **Create a leadership system that is similar in structure to many local school districts and state education agencies.**
  - Many local school districts and state education agencies currently have pupil services directors or profession-specific consultants or coordinators (i.e., school counseling directors, school psychologist supervisors, etc.) that plan, supervise and direct the activities of pupil services professionals. These professionals help the educational agencies focus on the supports needed for struggling learners or students at risk for school failure.
  - The absence of this leadership at the national level compromises the ability of local and state educational agencies to promote pupil service programs that have proven to be effective with the most difficult learners.
  
3. **Improve cross-agency coordination of services and programs supporting struggling learners and students at risk.**
  - Creating this office would facilitate the development of a comprehensive, child-focused, multifaceted, and cohesive system of learning supports.
  - A goal of this office would be to provide the leadership needed to improve cross-agency coordination of programs (SAMHSA, DOJ, HRSA and DOE), reduce gaps and inefficient redundancies in support services, streamline systems, and simplify and improve the understanding and participation of parents in their child’s comprehensive educational program.
  - The absence of leadership at the federal level limits the attention to these services and compromises the national communication and coordination of these services for all students in need.

## Background

Specialized instructional support personnel (currently "pupil services") encompass a large number of staff categories with a broad set of responsibilities in schools. The disciplines included are as follows: school counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, and school social workers; occupational therapists, physical therapists, art therapists, dance/movement therapists, and music therapists; speech-language pathologists and audiologists.

A number of State education agencies (SEAs) already provide leadership for pupil services by employing departments and/or coordinators for all or various subsets of these professions.

The Assistant Secretaries for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services and for Elementary and Secondary Education currently have authority over these personnel through the IDEA and the ESEA. However, no specific point of contact – office or individual within the U.S. Department of Education – is assigned to administer, coordinate, or carry out programs and activities concerned with providing specialized instructional support services in schools, or work with State pupil services coordinators or with SEAs in general on issues related to pupil services.

The U.S. Department of Education should have an office and staff dedicated to providing technical assistance and a specific point of contact on these services for State and local education agencies: **Office of Specialized Instructional Support Services.** (see attached Recommendation).

## Organization

The Office of Specialized Instructional Support Services will be under the supervision of the Director of Specialized Instructional Support Services. Since the functions of the Office are transdisciplinary, and affect all students K-12, the Director should report directly to the Deputy Secretary of Education, whose office currently coordinates the work of the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), the Office of Innovation and Improvement (OII), the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA), the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), and the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS).

The Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools should be subsumed under the proposed office, as most of the programs in OSDFS currently are staffed at the local level by specialized instructional support personnel. Several programs in OII, e.g., School Dropout Prevention and Mental Health Integration in Schools, would also most logically be placed under the new office.