Evaluation of Interventions Utilized in Individual Education Plan (IEP) Counseling in Hillsborough County Public Schools

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Objectives

- Overview of Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) and Exceptional Student Education (ESE) services provided
- Brief history of mental health and students identified as ESE
- Methodology of evaluation
- Present codes and themes
- Discuss implications and recommendations for program improvement
Mental health disorders among the ESE population can often impede the student’s ability to receive education within the general education classroom.\(^1\) In order to level the playing field, these students are provided any interventions or accommodations needed to assist them in attaining academic success.

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Barriers experienced in other school districts:\(^3\)

- Caseload requirements
- Assessments are priority to districts
- Assisting in determining special education eligibility

Requests for more training: over 65%

The Community Agency: Hillsborough County Public Schools

- 8th largest school district
- 208,177 total students
- 190,606 eligible
- 28,987 (14%) within Exceptional Student Education program

Pie chart:
- 73% N/A
- 14% IEP
- 8% EP
- 5% No Plan Defined
- 2% Other
Agency Need

- History of IEP counseling services in district
- Need to streamline process across disciplines
- New district funding focused on behavioral health
Current ESE Services Provided through HCPS

Educational Counseling

- provided on campus during school hours
- evaluation methods not present
- designated IEP counselors:
  - School Social Workers
  - School Psychologists
Specific Aims

- What does counseling as a supportive service mean in Hillsborough County Public Schools?
- How are the services delivered?
- Is there uniformity of practice among designated counseling providers?
- How are services being evaluated?
- Do the counselors have identified needs that could create more proficiency?
Methodology

- Focus Group Methodology
  - 5 groups
    - planned contrasting
  - 5 primary questions, 2 probing questions
    - audio recording/transcribed
  - MAXQDA
Areas of Study

- Identification
- Goal Setting
- Techniques Utilized
- Measuring Progress
- Perception of Professional Preparedness
Identification

- How are students within the exceptional student education program identified as needing counseling as a supportive service or intervention?
Focus Group Questions

Goal Setting:

- Do the goals outlined on the student’s individualized education plan (IEP) adequately address the counseling needs of the student?
Focus Group Questions

Techniques, Interventions and Methods:

- What counseling techniques, interventions or methods do you utilize?
Focus Group Questions

Evaluation:

- Are you measuring client progress toward the counseling goal?
  - What tools do you use to measure progress?
  - How often do you measure progress?
Focus Group Questions

Perception of professional preparedness:

- Do you feel the skills that you bring through your professional training adequately prepare you to provide the service?
Prospective Outcomes For Scholars

- Development of training manual
- Database of evidence based
- Uniform evaluative measures
Dissemination

- Institute for Translational Research in Adolescent Behavioral Health
- School Social Work Services
- School Psychology Department
- Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Department
Identification Themes

- IEP counselors not present during meetings to determine need or eligibility for counseling as a supportive service
- Definition of “counseling” in educational settings provided to all stakeholders
- Structured criteria for identifying students needing counseling on their IEP
Goal Appropriateness Themes

- Goals not always identified or present
- Vague terms
  - anger management
  - social skills
  - self-esteem
- Not quantifiable
- No structure
- Goal setting timeline
Methods, Techniques, and Intervention Themes

- Web based resources (teachers pay teachers.com)
- Department provided games and resources
- Cognitive behavioral therapy
- Solution-focused therapy
- Personal purchased books and games
Evaluation Themes

Evaluative tool:
- Classroom teacher observations and feedback
- District database (EdConnect)
- Grades
- Referrals
- Student self-reporting

Frequency:
- weekly
- monthly
- every 9 weeks
Preparedness Themes

- Adapting clinical skills to school setting
- District professional development (specific schools identified)
- Client and counselor compatibility
- Self-evaluated effectiveness
- Trainings only address paperwork

“IEP counseling what I am finding is not counseling.”
Perceived Strengths

- **Success stories**
  - “They still come to my door so that’s a benefit.”
  - “People ask me what do I do? I tell them I am my kid’s cheerleader.”

- **Individual school processes**
  - collaboration by administrations, school leaders

- **Individually created documents**

- **Collaboration with outside therapeutic resources**
Perceived Barriers

- Time and caseload constraints
- Student attendance
- Student buy-in
- Duration of services
- Duplication of services
- Collaborating with stakeholders
Recommendations

- Enhance training manual for designated IEP counselors
- Database of evidence based interventions for youth within ESE programs
- Professional development trainings offered year round with current research
- Regular meetings for designated counselors to share best practice
- Uniform self-evaluative measures for IEP counseling within HCPS
- Automated tracking system to identify students receiving IEP counseling and their progress
References

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Questions?