

Why Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Matters for Louisiana's Early Learning Centers

Building the Foundation for School Success

Just as Louisiana's K-12 schools provide mental health supports to help students succeed academically, our youngest learners need developmentally appropriate supports in their early learning centers. Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) serves as the early childhood equivalent of school-based mental health services—helping children develop the relationship skills, self-regulation, and behavioral skills they need to arrive at kindergarten ready to learn.

What the Research Shows

Multiple statewide studies demonstrate that IECMHC produces real, measurable improvements in children's school readiness. Children receiving these services show significantly lower levels of hyperactivity, restlessness, and problem behaviors.[1] Importantly, these benefits extend beyond individual children—research from Ohio found that even children who weren't directly receiving services improved when their classrooms had mental health consultation support, demonstrating that IECMHC enhances the overall learning environment for all children.[2]

Keeping Children in Learning Environments

One of the most critical functions of IECMHC is preventing expulsion from early learning programs. Arkansas's statewide system achieved an expulsion rate of only 2.9% among high-risk children—keeping nearly all referred children in their learning environments rather than disrupting their education.[3] Child-focused consultation helps teachers shift their perceptions and understanding of challenging behaviors, allowing children to remain in educational settings where they can continue developing.[4]

Supporting Teachers and Strengthening Classrooms

IECMHC works by building teacher capacity—strengthening educator self-efficacy, classroom management skills, and teacher-child relationships.[5][6] These improvements in classroom climate and teaching practices create more supportive learning environments for all children. This approach mirrors the workforce development goals of K-12 mental health consultation, making IECMHC a natural extension of Louisiana's existing educational mental health system.

A Continuous System from Birth Through High School

Both IECMHC and K-12 school mental health services operate within the same tiered public health framework, using parallel assessment tools designed for different age groups.[7] This alignment creates a seamless birth-

through-18 educational mental health system. When housed within Louisiana's Department of Education, IECMHC facilitates data sharing, coordinated professional development, and consistent approaches across the entire educational continuum.

Just as comprehensive school mental health systems provide promotion, prevention, and intervention services in K-12 settings,[8] IECMHC delivers these same functions in early learning centers through consultation that strengthens classroom environments, builds teacher skills, and supports individual children when needed.

Preparing All Children for School Success

Research demonstrates that improvements in children's relationship and behavioral skills through early interventions contribute uniquely to kindergarten reading achievement and learning engagement.[9] IECMHC addresses these foundational skills during the critical early years, positioning children for academic success when they enter formal schooling. By preventing expulsion, supporting teacher development, and improving classroom quality, IECMHC ensures that Louisiana's youngest learners can access and benefit from early education—arriving at kindergarten ready to succeed.

References

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