

Public School Certification for Marriage and Family Therapists

On July 10, 2007, Governor M. Jodi Rell signed Public Act 07-241, which provides for Licensed Marital and Family Therapists (LMFTs) to be certified to work in public schools. School districts have contracted for services from Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) for years, often bringing MFTs into the schools. However, MFTs were not certified by the Connecticut State Department of Education to be employed directly by public schools. Although they have been recognized for years as licensed mental health professionals by the CT Department of Public Health, MFTs were the only mental health professionals who, until now, have not been certified.

This certification will benefit schools and students in three major ways: First, research confirms that effective treatment of school-age children requires the support and involvement of their families. (CT's Child Health and Development Institute, Dept. of Children and Families, and Court Support Services have all recognized family therapy as effective with children.) MFT certification will strengthen children and families to take full advantage of educational opportunities. Second, it will enable Connecticut schools to have equal access to the clinical staff of their choice, strengthening their ability to educate children in the context of current environmental challenges. Finally, certification will protect the public by ensuring that schools hire professionals with specific MFT training relevant to schools.

● **MFTs are already valued contributors at public and private schools that use their expertise.** In practice, many MFTs provide contracted services to schools throughout Connecticut through local youth service bureaus, child guidance clinics, other private agencies, the Department of Children and Families, and private practice.

● **MFTs are uniquely trained to work with individual students, families, and larger systems.** Utilizing a multisystems approach, they consider and address all the factors that affect a student's ability to function at school. Their education and clinical training prepare MFTs to provide interventions to address such issues as:

- social, behavioral, and academic problems
- crisis intervention
- bullying, anger, and violence
- divorce, loss, and other family difficulties
- anxiety, school phobia, and depression
- substance abuse

● **MFTs complement other services in schools.** They collaborate with counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, special education staff, school nurses, and teachers, and also consult with physicians, police, and other community agencies that interact with students. Each school system has unique needs. Certification of MFTs will ensure that schools have standardized access to the **full** range of health care services to meet the needs of their particular systems.

● **MFTs must meet rigorous training standards.** All MFTs are required to have a minimum of 500 hours of direct client contact in order to complete their master's degree (typically three years), and an additional 1000 hours of client contact before they can become licensed (typically two years). These are among the most stringent clinical training requirements of all mental health professions.