What challenges are school psychologists currently facing?

Across the country, school psychologists are facing changes in their roles as education reform is increasingly driven by policy changes at the national and state levels. The reauthorization of the IDEA (2004) brought funding changes, greater awareness to the importance of early intervening services, changes in how we determine eligibility for special services, and a new look at how we evaluate student response to intervention and the related measurement of student progress. The creation of the Race to the Top program (2009), spearheaded by President Obama's administration, was the catalyst for sweeping policy reforms at the state level as legislatures adopted new laws in order to hopefully compete more effectively for federal grant money. This program has resulted in the adoption of a variety of new policies and practices including new academic standards, changes in teacher evaluation and compensation, an increasing presence of community agencies in the delivery of services to children in schools, and changes in how we measure student progress and help failing schools meet the needs of students. As a result, in many states school psychologists are being called upon to prove their value, adapt or modify their role, collaborate more with external stakeholders, and serve a population of students with growing needs. Although the situation varies by state and district, the tough economic times combined with the dramatic policy changes occurring across our country, have created a "professional crisis" for some school psychologists as school administrators, teachers, and parents are asking "What do school psychologists do?" and "How does it impact student performance?" And as with any crisis, there is both "danger" and "opportunity" requiring school psychologists to become keenly aware of the forces that may act as a catalyst for, as well as an agent against, their advocacy for the NASP Practice Model.

Economic Crisis. The economic crisis is affecting school psychologists across the country. In some places, school psychologists are seeing positions cut, and their roles redefined as budget constraints limit school based psychological services. At the same time, the need for prevention and intervention services is skyrocketing as schools and students are held to higher standards while at the same time students and faculty are struggling with personnel crises created by tightening budgets, losses of jobs, and home foreclosures.

In 2010, NASP conducted an informal poll to assess the impact that the declining economy was having on students, families and communities. Anecdotal responses...
reflected growing stress and anxiety, increased behavior problems, and difficulty meeting basic needs. These issues are even greater for children who are impacted by parents in the military, those who are immigrants, refugees, or in foster care. As general education resources dwindle, many communities, school staff--including school psychologists--are struggling to meet the need of their students while also grappling with personal family challenges.

**Public Perceptions and Policy.** There continues to be confusion about the role of the school psychologist, the services we provide to students and schools, and the value of these services given the current landscape in education. There is uncertainty regarding where these services fit into current education reform efforts and administrative priorities. This lack of awareness exists among local, state and federal stakeholders and in the media. To many outside of the field of education (and to some within the field), there are no “school” psychologists (people with specialized education and psychological training, skills and knowledge for work in schools), just “psychologists” who happen to work in schools.

This confusion and lack of awareness about the importance of school psychologists and the services we provide has the potential to result in fewer school psychology positions, a narrowed role focusing more on compliance with legal mandates, higher case loads, the loss of a professional identity, and reduced availability of services for children and youth.

**What does the NASP Practice Model provide?**

Promoting the NASP Practice Model [www.nasponline.org/standards/practice-model/](http://www.nasponline.org/standards/practice-model/) at the local, state and federal levels is the best remedy for addressing the changing landscape of educational reform. It provides opportunities for integrated advocacy and communication resources to help school psychologists preserve their jobs, promote their role, and advocate for attention to the needs of students and families. Advocacy for the legislative adoption of the NASP Practice Model insulates the profession from future risk and serves as a protective factor for the profession and the lives of children, youth and the school community.

The NASP Practice Model:

- Delineates skills and services available from school psychologists across 10 domains of practice.
- Describes the general framework within which services should be provided.
- Promotes the connection between school psychologists’ training, standards, and actual practice.
- Recommends a ratio for schools implementing this comprehensive model of one school psychologist to every 500–700 students (1:500-700) depending on level of need within the student population.
• Creates the capacity to make the best, most cost-effective use of school psychologists' skills and expertise, which are an existing but sometimes underutilized resource in schools.

• Allows flexibility for agencies and professionals to develop policies and procedures that meet local needs, while also providing sufficient specificity to ensure appropriate, comprehensive service provision.

• Provides a reference for assessing continuing professional development needs.

• Provides an organized and coherent framework to advocate for and communicate about school psychological services.

Knowing the Basics of the NASP Practice Model

The NASP website has an extensive amount of information about the NASP Practice Model and every state that is embarking on advocacy for the model should make sure that all advocates are clear on the basics of the NASP Practice Model, how it benefits students and schools, and basic information supporting the importance advancing national professional standards. To prepare advocates for their work, here are a few suggested activities:

1. Watch the NASP Practice Model webinar.

2. Become familiar with the NASP Practice Model webpage.
   http://www.nasponline.org/standards/practice-model/
   a. Review the promotion and implementation materials.
   b. Become familiar with the Practice Model brochure. This tool will be the primary document that you will share with stakeholder groups when talking about the model. http://www.nasponline.org/standards/practice-model/Practice_Model_Brochure.pdf

3. Review the basic talking “talking points” that can be used to promote the model and answer people’s questions about the model. These points were summarized in a 2010 Communiqué article.

Once your advocates are prepared and understand the basics of the Model and the benefits to be achieved from adoption of the Model, then you are ready to begin planning your advocacy campaign.