



Leadership and Advocacy for Early Career School Psychologists

When beginning a career in school psychology, many recent graduates find themselves assuming leadership positions in order to bring about systemic change. In this handout, the characteristics of leadership as relevant to the practice of school psychology will be defined. In addition to advocating for students and their families, leaders in school psychology also advocate for their profession, and the information within this handout will explain why advocacy is important. Finally, the early career school psychologist will be given resources and ideas on how to embody the characteristics of a leader and become an effective advocate.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP

School psychologists should provide leadership in developing schools as safe, civil, caring, inviting places where there is a sense of community, in which contributions of all persons are valued, in which there are high expectations of excellence for all students, and where home–school–agency partnerships are valued.

—*School Psychology: A Blueprint for Training and Practice III*
(Ysseldyke et al., 2006)

While leadership is important to successful practice, early career school psychologists may hesitate before taking on leadership roles. One challenge is that leadership is not well defined within our specialty area (Shriberg, 2008). It is therefore up to school psychologists to embody the characteristics of leadership throughout our careers and determine when and how we can best use our skills and training to effect change.

The data collected from a 2006 survey of 89 school psychology state association presidents, presidents-elect, and NASP delegates found five important characteristics associated with effective leadership among school psychologists (Shriberg, 2008). According to this survey, those who take on effective leadership roles treat others with respect, demonstrate ethical behavior, are regarded as competent, establish strong working relationships with teachers, and work well in teams.

IMPORTANCE OF ADVOCACY

School psychologists have an ethical responsibility to advocate! NASP's 2010 *Principles for Professional Ethics* state that school psychologists have a responsibility to advocate for the following:

- Policies and practices that are in the best interests of children and respect and protect their legal rights (Standard IV.1.2)
- The qualification and practices of school psychologists (Introduction)
- The proper storage and disposal of records (Standard II.4.9)

These standards can be downloaded from the NASP website (<http://www.nasponline.org/standards/2010standards.aspx>).

In addition, NASP pledges to “advocate for the value of school psychological services and for appropriate research-based education and mental health services for all children, youth, and families” (NASP Vision, Mission, and Goals, http://www.nasponline.org/about_nasp/strategicplan.pdf). NASP’s current strategic plan also specifically identifies increasing the number of school psychologists and graduate students trained in advocacy skills as a broad advocacy objective.

We advocate for our profession because the services that our profession provides are essential for many students . . . without you—the school psychologist—the services that students need to overcome barriers to learning may not be available or accessible to them and this may compromise their ability to learn and to graduate from school. (Skalski, 2009)

There are numerous ways to promote effective advocacy among early career school psychologists. NASP has developed an easy-to-access resource at <http://www.nasponline.org/advocacy/index.aspx>. This site provides information about the NASP policy platform and gives ready-to-use tools at the Advocacy Action Center. In addition, school psychologists should be positive, hopeful, and respectful at all times and strive to contribute knowledge, opinions, reflections, and ideas. School psychologists should volunteer and accept invitations to advocate. Despite obstacles they may encounter, school psychologists should remain committed until the desired outcome or goal is achieved. This will ensure that they are agents to positive change and reform (Skalski & Klotz, 2008).

TAKING LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY FURTHER

Leadership and advocacy for early career school psychologists can occur in multiple ways and at numerous levels:

- It may occur in individual schools. For example, school psychologists can facilitate the implementation of building-wide prevention and intervention programs, such as positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS).
- Leadership and advocacy can occur in school districts. This may involve presenting to high school and college classes on school psychology. Additionally, school psychologists can develop relationships with their superintendent and school board members in efforts to promote the profession and the services they provide to students and families. They may volunteer to collaborate with others to support the development of a comprehensive mental health service delivery program that incorporates equity in access for students from diverse backgrounds.
- At the local level, it is important for school psychologists to become active in their school psychology organization and to develop relationships with faculty within nearby graduate education programs. Other examples of leadership and advocacy involve mentoring graduate students and becoming certified by the American Red Cross to provide mental health services in the event of a disaster in the community.
- At the state level, school psychologists should become active in their state school psychology organization. School psychologists can write grants to support services in their schools, visit or write letters to state legislators, and become knowledgeable about state credentialing requirements.

- To promote leadership and advocacy at the national level, school psychologists should become active in NASP. This includes submitting proposals and articles for *Communiqué* and the NASP convention, attending advocacy-related special sessions at the NASP convention, and attending the NASP Public Policy Institute and summer conferences. It is also important to become familiar with the NASP advocacy section of the website, take the NASP PREPARE training, and obtain the NCSP credential. Finally, many NASP workgroups and interest groups actively seek assistance with special projects as well as new members; this is a wonderful way for early career school psychologists to network with others and take on leadership roles at the national level.
- At every level, school psychologists should promote equity in access to educational resources and mental health services for all children and youth. They should also advocate for increased diversity within the field. The NASP Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Ambassadors of Recruitment program recruits individuals who are interested in working toward this goal (<http://www.nasponline.org/resources/culturalcompetence/cld.aspx>).

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