

May 13, 2009

American Psychological Association
750 First Street, NE
Washington, D.C. 20002-4242

Dear Members of the Board of Educational Affairs and Model Licensure Act Task Force:

The Georgia Association of Educators (GAE) represents more than 42,000 individuals employed by the Georgia public school system. Most importantly, however, we represent the interests of 1.7 million children who attend Georgia's public schools. As the President of GAE, I am offering this letter in support of our members who are employed by the Georgia Public School System and provide our children with superb services as school psychologists.

It is my understanding that there is a movement afoot to discontinue the exemption provided to school psychologists in the APA Model Licensure Act. On behalf of the individuals who are members of GAE and are employed as school psychologists, I am requesting that the APA strongly reconsider this action and consider the potential harm that may arise as a result of making such a decision. School psychologists understand psychology- they understand school-aged children. This group of specially trained professionals understands school culture, climate, and curriculum and their specialized training allows them to function in the public school environment where those who have not received exposure to such an environment may not be as successful. This may create unintended consequences of compromising the level of care that our students receive.

There are many reasons why an exemption for school psychologists should be maintained in the APA Model Licensure Act. As you reconsider this action please consider the following:

- Altering the definition of a school psychologist could impact the quality services that children can now seamlessly access. Critical school psychological services to students in need could be disrupted significantly, and this would contribute to increasing shortages of qualified school mental health professionals available to respond to student needs. Such a disruption would certainly have a detrimental effect on academic achievement, school climate, and on compliance with federal and state regulations.
- Schools could potentially experience significant financial implications as a result of the need to hire more doctoral level practitioners to meet statutory and regulatory requirements. Currently 75% practicing school psychologist are specialist-level trained, and these professionals would be restricted in their use of the title "school psychologist" and the practice of psychology in the schools.

- Finally, we are concerned that licensed psychologists would have access to the title and practice of “school psychologist.” They would be permitted to use the title and practice in schools even if they were not trained in school psychology or did not hold a “school psychologist” state credential. Professionals with specialty training understand the nuances of working in a school building with other school-level professionals. Their training has made them both sensitive and flexible to the demanding school environment. It would be grossly unfair to the student to place him/her with an unfamiliar professional and potential malpractice for the psychologist to be placed in an unfamiliar environment.

For these reasons, and mostly for Georgia’s 1.7 million children in the public school system, I am respectfully asking that the APA continue to provide an exemption to school psychologists in its Model Licensure Act. It will ensure the continuation of strong and necessary services that our students need; it will decrease the potential disruption in services; and it will ensure Georgia’s compliance with both federal and state laws and regulations.

Thank you so much for taking the time to review the contents of this letter. If I can answer any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. In the interim, I remain.

Sincerely,



Jeff Hubbard
President

cc: Deborah Crockett, President
Kimberly Evans, Georgia Association of Educators Liaison
Georgia Association of School Psychologists

Stacy Skalski, Director of Public Policy
National Association of School Psychologists