



Washington, DC

NASP ADVOCACY ACADEMY

Building Capacity to Address Shortages in School Psychology

NASP 
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
School Psychologists

2021 Advocacy Academy Virtual Capitol Hill Experience Using Your Voice for Effective Advocacy

On Thursday, July 22nd, Advocacy Academy participants will spend the day meeting with their elected federal officials in a virtual format to advocate for public policy that addresses shortages in school psychology. This document contains information about NASP [policy and legislative priorities](#), talking points, research, and other useful information to help you prepare for your meetings. This document does not contain an exhaustive list of all legislative and policy priorities of NASP. Rather, this resource is focused on the shortages issue with specific legislative and appropriations asks.

If you have specific questions or need additional guidance, please connect with your GPR Regional Representatives or NASP Staff.

- **Southeast:** Shlon Smith (shlon.smith@gmail.com) or Nikki Sutton (nsutton013@gmail.com);
- **Northeast:** Peter Faustino (pcfaustrino@verizon.net) or Julia Szarko (drladyjulia@gmail.com);
- **Central:** Kari Oyen (kari.oyen@usd.edu) or Chavez Phelps (Chavez.Phelps@indstate.edu);
- **Western:** Brittany Greiert (bsovrn@gmail.com) or Tess Melendrez (tmoran714@gmail.com); and /or
- **NASP Staff:** Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach (kvaillancourt@naspweb.org) or Becca Murdoch (rmurdoch@naspweb.org).

Setting the Stage for Advocacy: Steps to Ensure a Successful Meeting

How to Prepare for Your Meeting

You will have access to pre-academy training modules that will cover how to prepare for your meeting. *We ask that you watch the entirety of the pre-academy modules before the live Advocacy Academy begins on July 21st.* You will also be given virtual planning time to meet in your teams to further develop your messages and stories that you want to share with your elected officials. However, there are some things that you can do in advance to help you prepare. In addition, please use your GPR regional representatives as a resource. (Contact information above). For example, if you have questions about how to locate state-specific data on the shortages or are having difficulty connecting with other Advocacy Academy participants in your state, they can help you! They are seasoned advocates and are happy to give you tips on how to have a successful meeting.

Review Contents of the Virtual Hill Packet

The contents of the Hill packet can be reviewed [online](#). You do not need to memorize everything on this page, nor do you need to reference each document in your meetings. This virtual packet, which you will email to the Congressional staffer after each meeting, is intended to supplement your discussions and provide additional, detailed, information regarding shortages research and policy and school psychology to the Hill staffers you will meet with. This allows you to spend the bulk of your meeting time telling your personal stories of how the shortage of school psychologists is impacting your school community.

Research Your Elected Officials and Their Priorities

If you do not know your Members of Congress, you can visit [NASP's Advocacy Action Center](#) and enter your zip code to find out. Spend some time reading about your Senators and Representatives to get a sense of what their priorities are as they relate to healthcare workforce shortages, school mental health, and education in general.

You may want to see what issues they campaigned on, what bills they have sponsored, if they have educators in their family, etc. Basic information on your representative (their committees, party affiliation, etc.) can be found on the state's legislative website, on your Member's page, or through a quick Google search. You can find information on your representative's stance on various issues via their campaign website. Identifying a member's voting record can take a bit more digging into state legislative websites (searching for specific bills, etc.), but websites (such as [Ballotpedia](#)) outline federal votes on key pieces of legislation. Feel free to contact Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach (kvaillancourt@naspweb.org) or Becca Murdoch (rmurdoch@naspweb.org) if you have specific questions about a legislator or need help tracking down information.

Review Proposed Shortages Legislation

NASP is seeking support for two pieces of legislation and a request for FY2022 appropriations, all of which are described below. Each bill is hyperlinked to a webpage that contains the full text of the legislation, as well as additional information about the bill. Some bills have been introduced in both the House and the Senate (bi-cameral), other bills have been introduced in just one chamber of Congress.

- For each bill, **determine if your Senator or Representative is a co-sponsor** of the legislation.
 - To view the co-sponsors, click the link "Bill Summary and Status" at the top of the page. Then click the link "Co-Sponsors." Information about every piece of legislation being considered by Congress is available at the Library of Congress: <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php>.
 - If your elected official IS a sponsor, thank them for their support of this bill if it comes up in conversation.
 - If they are not, encourage them to co-sponsor this legislation, or support it when it is called for a vote.
- **Don't worry about understanding the fine details of each bill.** Instead focus on 2 main points:
 - **How** does the bill propose to address school psychology shortages?
 - **Why** is such a policy needed and what are the consequences of not addressing this issue?
- If you would like more specific information about a bill or public policy concern prior to the Capitol Hill Experience, contact Dr. Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach, (kvaillancourt@naspweb.org) or Becca Murdoch (rmurdoch@naspweb.org), both members of NASP staff.

S.1811 Increasing Access to Mental Health in Schools Act

H.R. 3572 Increasing Access to Mental Health in Schools Act

This legislation would establish a grant program to increase the number of mental health professionals at low income schools by supporting partnerships between institutions of higher education and local education agencies to support teaching, training, and employment of school counselors, social workers, and psychologists. This legislation formed the basis of the Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant.

S. XX Mental Health in Schools Excellence Program Act

H.R. XX Mental Health in Schools Excellence Program Act

This program is modeled after the post 9/11 Yellow Ribbon GI Bill and creates a partnership between ED and universities to create tuition grants for students (priority given to Pell recipients) who complete a training program that leads to a credential as a school mental health professional.

FY 2022 Appropriations

Support \$600 million in funding for the School Safety National Activities program, with the \$500 million increase over FY2021 level be specifically designated for a new round of grants that both address the shortages in school psychology: the [Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant](#) and the [School Based Mental Health Services Grant Program](#).

Develop Your Message(s) and Specific Asks

Consider how school psychology shortages affect your school/district/state and how you want your elected officials to know about and act upon. Senators and Representatives are very interested in what is happening in their state/district and this is a great time to personalize this issue to your individual community. As you prepare your message and talking points focus on how you will convey **three key ideas**:

1. Why are school psychology shortages a problem?
2. What **action(s)** are needed to remedy the shortages?
3. What are the **benefits** of these actions and what **research** supports them?

Talking Points, Selected Research, and Federal Policy Asks on Shortages

Talking points, priority legislation, and research about the shortage of school psychologists are listed below. These are framing devices and strategies to **guide and inform** your discussion of school psychology shortages. You will have time during the Advocacy Academy to further refine and personalize your messages as you prepare for your meetings. You should try to incorporate data/messages from your own state and district if applicable. Some Congressional staffers and/or elected officials may not be familiar with terminology/jargon often used by school psychologist (e.g. MTSS, PBIS, RTI, psychological safety). Be sure to offer a brief explanation of unfamiliar terms when needed. During your visits, keep in mind time limitations for each meeting; most meetings will not last longer than 30 minutes, with many being shorter.

Policy Priority: Remedy the Shortages in School Psychology

There is a critical shortage in school psychology, both in terms of practitioners and in the availability of graduate education programs and faculty needed to train the workforce necessary to keep up with the growing student population. NASP recommends a ratio of one school psychologist per 500 students in order to provide comprehensive school psychological services. Current data estimates a national ratio of 1:1211; however, great variability exists among states, with some states approaching a ratio of 1:5000. Shortages in school psychology, like shortages in other related education and mental health professions, have the potential to significantly undermine the availability of high-quality services to students, families, and schools. Consequences of the shortages include unmanageable caseloads, the inability for school psychologists to provide prevention and early intervention services or regularly consult with families and teachers, reduced access to mental and behavioral health services for some students, and limited scope of service delivery.

The Problem

- 1 in 5 children and youth will experience a mental health disorder.
- Approximately 80% of students who need mental health care do not receive it. Those that do, access care in schools. Further, students are more likely to ask for help if services are available at school.
- Critical personnel shortages of school-based mental health professionals result in unmet needs across the country, especially in rural and low-income areas.

Actions to address the Problem

- Support the Increasing Access to Mental Health in Schools, which helps create university/district partnerships to develop a pipeline of school employed mental health professionals to hard to staff districts.
- Support the Mental Health in Schools Excellence Program, which creates a federal/university matching program to cover the cost of attendance to become of school mental health professional.
- Support funding increases for the School Based Mental Health Services Provider Demonstration Grant, and the School Based Mental Health Services Program. Both of these grant programs support innovative efforts to address the shortages in school psychology and other school mental health fields.
- Support other legislation that maintains, creates, or expands federal investments in supporting the cost of graduate education that results in certification/licensure and employment as a school based mental

health service provider (e.g. public service loan forgiveness, federal/university matching programs to cover the cost of school attendance; expansion of grants to help incentivize entry into fields of critical shortage).

- Support funding and other federal guidance and technical assistance to facilitate SEA and LEA efforts to align staffing ratios with recommendations generated from national professional organizations to allow for the delivery of a full range of services.

Benefits and Supporting Research

- Improving the ratio of school psychologists helps promote a positive school climate and create a safe and supportive learning environment for all students.
- Improving the ratio allows schools psychologists to improve teachers' ability to teach and support student learning.
- Effective school safety measures require adequate access to school psychologists and other school-employed mental health professionals
- School staff rate the services provided by school psychologists as very important, including assessment, special education input, consultation, counseling, crisis intervention, and behavior management (Watkins, Crosby, & Pearson, 2007).
- Mental and behavioral wellness is directly linked to overall positive student achievement, school climate, high school graduation rates, and the prevention of risky behaviors, disciplinary incidents, and substance abuse (Center for Health and Healthcare in Schools, 2014).
- Comprehensive school mental health programs include mental health promotion and prevention programming for all students as well as screening, assessment, and effective prevention and treatment interventions and services for those students with more intensive needs. When programs are able to identify and address student mental and behavioral challenges early, students are more likely to gain resiliency skills and be successful in school and life while the threat of later harm is reduced (Conley, Shapiro, Kirsch, & Durlak, 2017; Csillag et al., 2016; Dekovic et al., 2011; McLaughlin et al., 2010; Stockings et al., 2016; Weeks, Hill, & Owen, 2017).
- School mental health services have been found to improve aspects of the school climate; reduce special education referrals (Bruns, Walrath, Glass-Siegel, & Weist, 2004); and produce declines in disciplinary referrals, suspension, grade retention, and special education referrals and placement among at-risk students (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

What To Do During Your Meeting

- Prior to your meeting, check your internet connection, audio and video capabilities, and try to ensure your virtual meeting is in a quiet and private space where you are less likely to be disturbed or interrupted.
- Prior to your meeting, decide on a meeting leader who will facilitate introductions and discussion. Different meeting participants can cover specific aspects of the issue and asks, but there should be one main leader to guide the conversation.
- Introductions
 - Thank the legislative assistant/Representative/Senator for taking the time to visit with you.
 - **Identify yourselves as constituents** and provide a **brief** statement about yourself and your experience in school psychology/education.
- Talking Points:
 - Offer basic information about the role of school psychologists and the importance of our work in supporting school and student success and making sure *all* students have access to a high quality public education. Keep this brief. **Focus on kids.**
 - Focus on the comprehensive role of a school psychologist including, prevention, intervention, and consultation services with school staff and families. Reference information in the packet that

explains what a school psychologist does and how we coordinate with others to provide comprehensive learning supports that help students achieve their best.

- Describe the shortage of school psychologists and the effects it has on students, educators, and school communities. Explain the importance of the NASP-recommended ratio and how service delivery is affected when those [ratios are higher than they should be](#).
- Share your story! Include relevant anecdotal comments, situations, and your experience as a school psychologist throughout the meeting. Talk about how your work has specifically been impacted by school psychologist shortages. If your district meets the NASP-recommended ratio, share how that has positively impacted your ability to provide services to students.
- If there is a specific policy that addresses the shortage and is working well (or is not working well) in your state or district, share information about it. **Members of Congress are highly interested in what is happening in their home state/district.**
- Be sure to mention the importance of collaboration among teachers, administrators, parents, families, and communities in addressing the needs of children and youth.
- Don't worry if you are asked a question that you do not know the answer to. Let them know you will follow up and provide the contact information for Dr. Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach (kvaillancourt@naspweb.org).
- Ending the Meeting
 - Ask if the legislative assistant/elected official has any questions.
 - Ask what their general perception of these proposals and requests are and if they think that their boss can support these issues.
 - Offer to provide future input if needed. (Follow up as requested.)
 - Thank them for their time and attention to your issues.

What To Do After Your Meeting

- Email the staffer(s) with whom you met
 - Provide a general summary of your conversation
 - Include additional relevant information, including a link to the online [Hill Packet](#)
 - Follow up on specific requests
 - Complete your online meeting evaluation form (only 1 per meeting)
 - Evaluation form is available
here: <https://www.votervoice.net/NASPOnline/Surveys/7047/Respond>