



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
School Psychologists

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## **NASP Applauds New Report Calling for Increased Access to School Mental Health Professionals for Students With Trauma and Other Risk Factors**

Bethesda, MD—The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) applauds the Center for American Progress (CAP) for its recent report, "[Counsel or Criminalize? Why Students of Color Need Supports, Not Suspensions.](#)" The paper highlights a growing crisis in our nation's schools caused by the lack of access to school-employed mental health professionals, particularly for students of color and those suffering from trauma, who too often receive harsh discipline instead of the mental health supports they need.

NASP shares concerns laid out in the report that only a fraction of the 35 million children experiencing trauma—which contributes to significant negative school and life outcomes—have access to a school psychologist or social worker. In many communities, schools are often the sole access point for mental health services for children and youth. Trauma and long-term exposure to violence contribute to disruptive behavior, poor attention, truancy, academic problems, and emotional and behavior challenges. Lack of adequate school mental health supports puts these children at increased risk for school failure, alcohol and substance abuse, and dropping out. The situation is greatly exacerbated by a tendency in many schools to respond to behavior issues with harsh punishment, including suspensions and expulsions, which are widely known to fuel the school-to-prison pipeline and increase engagement in risky behavior. All of these issues disproportionately affect children of color, who experience higher rates of trauma, violence exposure, poverty, and punitive discipline.

NASP concurs with the report's call to increase access to school psychologists, school social workers, and school counselors. As the report notes, each profession has distinct and necessary skill sets, and the presence of one does not negate the need for the others. Most importantly, these professionals are specifically trained to provide services in schools, which improves service delivery. They understand the learning and teaching process, classroom environments, links between mental health and learning, methods to minimize disruptions to learning time, and education law. School psychologists play a critical role in providing comprehensive mental health services to all students, creating trauma-informed schools, and providing professional development to teachers and other school staff on mental and behavioral health, positive discipline strategies, trauma-informed practices, and restorative justice. Equally important, school psychologists and other school-employed mental health professionals are integral members of the school team and are familiar to students and their families.

For these reasons, having a contracted relationship with a clinical or community provider is not a substitute for having a team of school-employed mental health professionals. Rather, school–community partnerships led by school mental health staff offer the most cohesive, effective continuum of services. School psychologists are critical players in creating and implementing partnerships that encompass wellness promotion, prevention, and targeted services, and they help to connect students and families with intensive needs to community providers and other resources.

As noted in the report, increasing access to school mental health professionals, like school psychologists, requires both a shift in priorities relative to school resource allocations and a commitment to address the growing shortage of these professionals. NASP recommends a ratio of 1 school psychologist for every 500–700 students. Staffing ratios vary quite a bit state to state, but the current national estimated ratio is 1 school psychologist per 1,383 students. In some states, like Texas, the ratio is 1:2,203.

NASP is actively working to increase access to school psychologists and other mental health professionals and to address critical shortages. NASP actively promotes and supports the following policy recommendations to increase access to school mental health professionals and create school environments that support student learning and decrease harsh overly punitive discipline practices.

- Create or expand existing loan forgiveness programs to include school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers on par with existing loan forgiveness programs for teachers and other professionals working in hard to staff areas.
- Promote school funding policies that help states, districts, and schools work toward the recommended ratio of 1 school psychologist to every 500–700 students.
- Incentivize the development of comprehensive school mental and behavioral health programs that include trauma-infused practices and effective discipline practices, and that utilize a team of school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers.
- Develop school–community partnerships that promote genuine collaboration between school psychologists and community mental health providers.
- Expand job-embedded, ongoing professional development for school staff related to trauma informed practices.
- Promote policies that improve school climate, positive discipline, and comprehensive school safety.

We urge education leaders and policy makers at the federal, state, and local levels to take seriously the imperative to increase access to school psychologists, school social workers, and school counselors in order provide needed mental health supports to students with trauma and other risk factors and to shift away from ineffective, even harmful, punitive discipline practices that exacerbate the risks for our most vulnerable students. We see great opportunity in the Every Student Succeeds Act to move forward on many of these issues, and we encourage state and local leaders to work with school-employed mental health professionals to craft effective policies.

NASP has a number of resources to help with this effort. These include:

- School Psychologists: Qualified Health Professionals Providing Child and Adolescent Mental and Behavioral Health Services <http://www.nasponline.org/white-papers/qualified-mental-health-professionals>
- NASP *Model for Comprehensive and Integrated Psychological Services* (NASP Practice Model) <http://www.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/nasp-practice-model>
- ESSA Policy and Practice Resources <http://www.nasponline.org/essa>
- Leveraging ESSA, MTSS, and the NASP Practice Model: A Crosswalk to Help Every School and Student Succeed [www.nasponline.org/practice-model/ESSA-MTSS-crosswalk](http://www.nasponline.org/practice-model/ESSA-MTSS-crosswalk)
- A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools Framework <http://www.nasponline.org/schoolsafetyframework>

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*NASP empowers school psychologists by advancing effective practices to improve students' learning, behavior, and mental health. Further information is available at [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org).*