

SARA RICH

State Delegate Candidate: Oklahoma

Statement 2

NASP Leaders have adopted five strategic goals that guide the association's work. In your state, what are some gains being made in school psychology practice related to these goals, and what are some pressing challenges?

One of the most pressing issues in Oklahoma is the shortage of school psychologists, with a ratio of approximately 5,200 school psychologists per student (based on 2019-2020 available data). This shortage affects the ability of school psychologists to provide comprehensive services to students in our state. As with NASP, the Oklahoma School Psychological Association (OSPA) has prioritized the shortage of school psychologists as a strategic goal and taken several steps to address the issue. Currently, we are working with legislators to advocate for permanent funding of an annual stipend for Nationally Certified School Psychologists, which has been provided in the past on a "as funds are available" basis. Additionally, OSPA has partnered with a local school district on a federal mental health demonstration grant to recruit more professionals to the field of school-based mental health services. Through this grant, we have presented at local undergraduate universities and are currently training graduate students in a comprehensive model of school psychology services in rural settings. Another strategic goal for NASP and OSPA has been the implementation of comprehensive school-based mental health services. Due to the shortages faced in all Oklahoma school districts, our practitioners often are overwhelmed with special education testing responsibilities and not able to engage in a comprehensive service model. One way to address this is the implementation of prevention-based frameworks, such as Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). To further this goal within Oklahoma, I worked alongside one of our state representatives last year to pass new legislation that requires all Oklahoma pre-service teaching programs include curriculum on MTSS. This law was the first state-wide initiative to implement MTSS in Oklahoma schools, with the goal that MTSS will eventually be "the way we do school." This is a critical step for Oklahoma school psychologists. If schools are able to use data effectively to match their resources to the student needs and implement effective prevention programs, then school psychologists will be freed up to provide comprehensive and integrated services within their districts. If elected to the Oklahoma NASP delegate position, I will continue working with OSPA on these strategic goals and work to connect Oklahoma with our regional partners to develop creative solutions to the problems faced by our profession. I would be honored to serve as our national representative and continue to serve alongside the OSPA board in their mission to promote education, mental health, rights, and welfare of children and youth.