The NASP Leadership Assembly has adopted three 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?

The state of Colorado promotes the NASP Practice Model in a variety of ways. First and foremost, Aurora Public Schools is at the forefront of piloting NASP’s Excellence in School Psychology Services Program (ESPS) by utilizing the model to develop comprehensive mental health systems in our schools. We currently have several elementary, P-8, middle and high schools leveraging their expertise to create Exemplary tiered systems to meet the needs of our communities through data-based decision making; consultation and collaboration; academic and mental health referral systems all while engaging in equitable, ethical, culturally responsive and legally sound practices. Additionally, school psychologists are gaining momentum in using the model to create job specific annual evaluation rubrics in their districts. Finally, practitioners have introduced young adults to the field via the NASP Exposure Project at high schools and universities.

Workforce Shortages are a significant problem when attempting to meet the mental health demands in Colorado. To combat these issues, the three largest universities have school psychology programs that provide comprehensive training and experiences in a variety of domains. Additionally, CSSP partners with CDE and NASP to recruit professionals using CO HB-1036, which financially incentivizes school psychologists to obtain/maintain their NCSP credential. The pandemic has created challenges for rural and metro area mental health professionals as well. This shortage is a major concern being targeted with multiple initiatives including: immersion programs for pre-service professionals via weeklong experiences and technology trainings; online learning communities for practitioners intended for case consultation and professional development; and school psychologists who currently serve in district level positions being called back into schools to provide mental health services to students.

The Colorado Society of School Psychologists (CSSP) engage in several activities to promote Social Justice initiatives including attendance and outreach at the LGBTQIA+ Pride Festival; organizing Canned Food Drives; providing awards for outstanding DEIC practitioners and participating in Suicide Prevention/Awareness Walks. Additionally, multiple districts engage in authentic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion activities to support culturally responsive best practices regarding various intersectional identities.

Each of these goals do not come without Challenges. Due to Colorado’s significant personnel shortages, lack of financial resources, and pandemic related health concerns, we need to develop creative ways to navigate through the difficulties with care, thought and intentionality. A few ways to support these goals include establishing comprehensive email communications; maintaining collaborative online forums; and creating opportunities for professional development via partnerships across districts along with CSSP, CDE, NASP and the Colorado School Safety Resource Center.
Moreover, in order to recruit and retain practitioners in the field, it is vital to offer both financial incentives and leadership development. Providing scholarships for graduate students, mini grants for early career practitioners, mentorship and networking experiences, as well as opportunities to serve on boards and in organizations, allow for professionals to grow throughout their career. Through these multi-layered efforts, we can increase the ways in which Colorado supports the NASP Practice Model, Workforce Shortages and Social Justice Initiatives to advance the field of school psychology.