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 Illinois was the first in the nation to adopt social emotional learning standards into our school code. Since that time, opportunities and challenges have arisen for school psychologists. In 2010, the Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership (ICMHP) published a report about school-based mental health services for children. In that report, school psychologists are considered school mental health practitioners, recognized for our roles, training and leadership in this area. Illinois school psychologists support social emotional learning in our schools as a Tier 1 support to all students. In 2020, the Illinois School Psychologist Association (ISPA) held a town hall meeting on social justice. While there is always more to do in the area of social justice, having this, as well as resources from NASP, shows our commitment to equity. Illinois legal and codified commitment to social emotional learning and its impact thusly on social justice and equity is a rarity in the Midwest states.

The Illinois ratio of students to school psychologists is approximately 1200:1, one of the better state ratios but still not meeting that NASP recommendation of 500:1. The Illinois school code accepts Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) as a path to earning an Illinois Professional Educator License. We are already ahead of many states who do not. Allowing qualified school psychologists into our state and eases them into our state professional educator licensure without having to take costly additional classes. Following NASP guidance, Illinois recognizes the scope and practice needs for school psychologists in our nine state training programs. I think we have made great gains to promote the field of school psychology from a role no one has heard of to a respected field of study with multiple training programs and a doctoral consortium in school psychology internships. The NCSP is a credential expected and relied upon in the State of Illinois for quality.

Lastly, NASP’s goal to reduce workforce shortages in school psychology is a key goal of ISPA as well. This is an area close to my heart in our professional association. As Co-chair of the ISPA Governmental Affairs committee, I have been meeting with key legislators and state education leaders to promote the field of school psychology and encourage legislation to remediate shortages for the last two years. We are looking for innovative solutions that recognizes the complexity of our required scope of practice. In Illinois, we also have a coalition of the governmental/advocacy chairs of the sister related service providers called Speaking 4 Children. I am a participant in this group. Here we support legislation and methods to reduce the shortages in all of our fields. Despite that commitment, in 2022 to date there are 140.8 unfilled school psychologist positions in Illinois up from 117 the previous year according to www.ISBE.net, many due to a lack of candidates. We need to continue to work with our state school psychology training programs to explore ways to increase applicants, especially to serve in the needy areas of urban and rural school districts.