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 Montana Association of School Psychologists (MASP) is currently working to raise the profile of school psychologists. This work has been done through promotions at administrator conferences and in college level psychology courses using the NASP Exposure Project. MASP has also recently offered provide feedback on job descriptions with the aim of promoting a more comprehensive role that attracts out of state practitioners. This work is aligned with NASP’s goal to increase the number of highly qualified practitioners.

MASP has set long term goals of working with state and local education agencies in order to implement the NASP Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services. This involves working to decrease vacant school psychology positions, continuing to develop plans for recruitment, and building the capacity of current school psychologists to step into the role of a comprehensive school psychologist.

Montana is a large state with an abundance of small school districts who are served by itinerant school psychologists as well as many districts that are served by school psychologists who contract specific services. In Montana, many school employees may not know they have access to a school psychologist or school psychologists may not be able to realize the full scope of the practice model. Shortages in Montana have forced school psychologists to resort to triage services where most of the time we work with behavior, assessment, and paperwork. It is essential to our professional wellbeing to ensure that school psychologists are utilized as more than testing machines and gatekeepers to special education. Our skill set allows us to improve outcomes for all students, but is too often hindered by caseload ratios or by a lack of understanding by school staff of our skills in school safety, mental and behavioral health services, consultative services, data analysis and decision making, and systems level planning.

In working with our state association and creating a network of school psychologists across the state, it is my hope that we can successfully advocate for our profession in order to reduce shortages, enact the practice model more fully, and most importantly, improve outcomes for all students.