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?

As a school psychologist working in the diverse, urban district of Milwaukee, I can point to several positive highlights. My colleagues and I are encouraged and expected to orient our work to the NASP Practice Model, and we are given relative autonomy to produce a wide variety of services to benefit kids and families, not just preside over evaluations and IEPs. In the last several years, our department has increased the ways in which psychological services are offered throughout schools, with specialized Tier 3 programming and by increasing the number of school psychologists serving our students. Our district is not wholly unique, as other districts throughout Wisconsin have found creative ways to address the needs of students who require 504 accommodations, counseling and mental health services.

Social justice and more specifically, racial justice, has been a priority for more than two dozen psychologists in our district for the last five years. Our district workgroup has provided countless hours of social and racial justice professional development, including Courageous Conversations about Race and explicit training around how to make assessment work more culturally appropriate and more socially just to students of color. Many of our practicum trainees participate in, and are exposed to, this work. Moreover, some of these practitioners have brought the social and racial justice framework to a wider audience at the Wisconsin School Psychologists Association (WSPA). Their efforts created a standing committee that is now part of the WSPA Board, a significant accomplishment.

I say all these wonderful things about Milwaukee, and yet we represent less than ten percent of students in the state. There is great work happening across Wisconsin, and there is still much more to do. I have talked with psychologists who have worked elsewhere, those that have left us and returned and those across the state who paint a different picture of school psychology than the contemporary model of practice. They have described work representing a narrower scope of the NASP Practice Model, perhaps weighted more toward special education requirements and assessment of students. A major barrier to effective service delivery is not having enough psychologists, which leads districts to focus primarily on legal mandates, and simultaneously prevents practitioners from developing enhanced service delivery systems. Districts across the state are not immune to this problem.

A challenge for all districts, and in Milwaukee, has been to find and develop the requisite number of culturally and linguistically diverse psychologists to meet student needs. It is a common thread throughout all of the social and racial justice work from our union to our district, and to our state association. Part of the work of advocating for children is to endorse practices that will create capacity to bring the field of school psychology to high school and college students as a potential career choice, and to train graduate students in rigorous, comprehensive settings that
will allow them to not only meet the complex needs of our students, but to bring that knowledge forward to train future students.