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?

NASP’s Leadership Assembly has adopted its practice model, workforce shortage solutions, and social justice as the three strategic goals that guide the association’s work. Between the work of the Maryland School Psychologists’ Association (MSPA) and the local efforts of individual districts, Maryland has made several gains in these areas. However, there continue to be pressing challenges, as well.

Maryland continues to need support in the area of academic interventions and instructional support as we continue to use outdated programs that are not empirically supported. This makes it difficult for School Psychologists to make data based decisions in the MTSS and IEP processes. As well, we lack resources to provide adequate mental and behavioral health services and interventions, due to shortages and increased need. However, peer-to-peer consultation and collaboration; services to promote safe and supportive schools; equitable practices for diverse student populations; and legal, ethical, and professional practice continue to be gains made in the state of Maryland.

Workforce shortages are a popular topic nationally that certainly resonates with School Psychologists in the state of Maryland. With the Blueprint for Maryland’s Future, MSPA’s Legislative committee has put in an abundance of work to ensure School Psychologists are not excluded. Similar to any other educational field, there is a major shortage of School Psychologists. As a direct result of the work completed by the Legislative committee related to the Blueprint, several districts in Maryland have been attempting to address School Psychologists in terms of pay. With advocacy and encouragement, districts may be driven to increase pay and retain and recruit School Psychologists to address shortages. Pressing challenges to finding solutions to workforce shortages in Maryland are that funding from COVID-19 (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief fund; ESSER) is running out, and will soon be depleted. While the foundation has been laid, the appropriate steps to address shortages remains to be seen.

The topic of social justice made a prominent climb to the general population in 2020 with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. While it encompasses a variety of populations, social justice has been the topic of many book studies throughout the state of Maryland. We have also had a number of professional trainings offered by MSPA, grants provided to districts through MSPA, and at individual district levels. A continuing “big topic” in MSPA is social justice and systemic integration of practices into the goals and initiatives of MSPA. MSPA and local districts also provide NASP-approved professional development for School Psychologists meeting the criteria for NASP’s three hours of social justice to hold the Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) credential. Alternatively, a pressing challenge of Maryland’s social justice work is taking the work from the theoretical (book study) to application. We continue to see disproportionate Emotionally Disabled (ED) students, inconsistent
practices in identifying English-Language Learning (ELL) students, and overall distribution of SES in referrals to the special education process.

While Maryland has made gains in achieving NASP’s strategic goals, there continue to be pressing challenges.