



Key Messages and Talking Points for School Psychologists: Comprehensive School Mental and Behavioral Health Services

Across the country there is growing recognition of the importance of meeting the mental and behavioral health needs of children and youth, and the critical role of schools in doing this work. With this improved understanding, it is critical that we advocate at the local, state, and national levels for increased access to mental and behavioral health services in the school setting, as well as to school-based mental health professionals, like school psychologists.

Your voice is critical to this advocacy. These talking points can be used to advocate for:

- increased access to mental and behavioral health services;
- recognition of the unique skills and roles of school-employed mental health providers ;and
- improved ratios for school psychologists, as well as more effective use of existing school psychologists.

Select and adapt talking points to address your particular context. Talking points are organized by each broad issue and may overlap. Depending on the context of your community, you may not need to engage in advocacy in all of these areas. Following the talking points are suggested specific ‘asks’ that you could make of your building principal, superintendent/school board, state/federal policy makers, and other audiences. Related NASP resources containing additional, more in-depth information are provided at the end of this document.

COMPREHENSIVE MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

Key message: Comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services in schools improves students’ ability to learn.

- Providing ongoing access to mental health services creates a positive learning environment in which students feel connected to their school community. The continuum of school mental health includes promoting wellness, resiliency, skill building, and help-seeking behaviors. These are critical to student well-being and safety, and to identifying students who may need more intensive services or for those who require immediate intervention. School psychologists are specially trained to address these needs.
- Comprehensive school mental and behavioral health service delivery systems must include:
 - adequate access to school psychologists and other school-employed mental health professionals;
 - universal screening for all students, coupled with the availability of appropriate early intervention services for students identified as being at risk;
 - a continuum of interventions that include mental wellness promotion, early intervention, and a continuum of more targeted and intensive interventions for students with increasingly significant needs;
 - professional development (e.g., mental health first aid) for school staff, parents, and community members to help them recognize signs of mental health concerns in

- students and ways to connect them with the appropriate supports in the school and community;
 - evidence-based threat assessment and suicide risk protocols and teams; and
 - collaborative partnerships with community agencies and providers to help meet the needs of students with the most significant needs.
- School psychologists use expertise in data collection and interpretation to develop and monitor universal mental health screening processes to identify students in need of mental and behavioral health services, or concerns affecting the entire school community.
- School-based mental health professionals know how to address students' needs within the school context and create an environment conducive to learning.

Key message: Schools are in a unique position to play a critical role in addressing the mental health needs of children and youth.

- One in five students suffers from a mental health disorder and roughly 80% of children and youth who are in need of mental health services do not receive them.
- 70–80% of students who do receive mental health services receive them in school.
- Students are more likely to seek help if they need it if services are available in schools.
- Schools have the ability to implement multitiered systems of mental and behavioral health supports, in which a continuum of services (i.e. universal, targeted, intensive) are provided to address the needs of *all* students.
- Addressing students' mental health needs in school improves ongoing safety and crisis prevention and response through efforts to promote resilience, reduce and/or identify risk factors, and provide appropriate interventions.
- Schools are engrained in their local community and can engage in a broad range of partnerships to promote resiliency, wellness, school connectedness, and facilitate protective factors among students in collaboration with community partners (e.g., family service providers and mentors, community mental health centers, primary healthcare settings).
- School psychologists are able to support students' mental health needs across the service delivery tiers and can help coordinate with community providers offering additional or more intensive services.

Key message: School-employed mental health professionals should be there to support students and staff every day for the long term.

- Some districts mistakenly consider outsourcing mental health services to community providers as way to save money. This approach runs contrary to both long-term sustainability and availability of services to all students, as well as the services' relevance to the learning environment.
- School-employed mental health professionals integrate skills and knowledge related to mental health with training in education, learning, child development, and educational systems, improving the effectiveness of services provided in the learning context.
- Sustained supports provided by school-employed mental health professionals who understand the school culture and community are essential to effective crisis response and long-term recovery.
- School psychologists provide assessment, counseling, consultation to teachers and school administrators, ongoing monitoring of students and staff experiencing or at risk for mental health problems, and coordination with community services to support the more intensive

needs.

Key message: Given the widespread scope and prevalence of childhood adversity and trauma, promoting trauma-sensitive school approaches has the greatest potential to positively impact all students, regardless of trauma history.

- Childhood adversity, toxic stress, and trauma can negatively impact students' ability to thrive in school, at home, and throughout life.
- Trauma-sensitive schools promote:
 - feelings of physical, social, and emotional safety in students;
 - a shared understanding among staff about the impact of trauma and adversity on students;
 - positive and culturally responsive discipline policies and practices;
 - access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services; and
 - effective community collaboration.
- School psychologists are trained to implement trauma-sensitive and culturally appropriate practices.

Key Asks

- Sustained investments in comprehensive school mental and behavioral health service delivery systems that encompass mental wellness promotion, early identification/early intervention, and a continuum of increasingly intensive interventions.
- Sustained efforts toward reducing the ratio of students to school psychologists and other school employed mental health professionals.
- Universal screening and early intervention for students identified as being at risk for mental health issues.
- Development of school–community partnerships based on collaboration between school psychologists (and other school-employed mental health professionals) and community agencies and providers.
- Required professional development for all school staff on how to recognize the signs of mental health concerns in youth.
- Training for families and communities on how to recognize the signs of mental health concerns and how to report them to the proper adults.
- Effective utilization of school psychologists in the school setting to include mental and behavioral health provider.
- Create a trauma-sensitive school environment that fits with in the multitiered system of support framework by:
 - Prioritizing efforts to create safe and supportive school environments
 - Providing funds to integrate social-emotional learning into the curriculum
 - Adopting positive discipline and restorative justice practices

IMPROVING ACCESS TO SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Key message: School psychologists are uniquely positioned in schools to facilitate the development, delivery, and monitoring of prompt and effective mental and behavioral health services.

- School psychologists are specially trained to provide mental and behavioral health services in schools. They are also skilled in consultation and facilitating effective communication and collaboration with community agencies/providers to support the availability of the full

continuum of mental health services.

- It is not enough to simply provide training for schools and staff on how to identify students at risk; there must be a system and a plan in place for providing identified individuals with needed services that includes ensuring adequate access to school psychologists.
- School psychologists have expertise in data collection and interpretation. They can develop and monitor universal mental health screening processes to identify students in need of mental and behavioral health services, or concerns affecting the entire school community.
- School psychologists facilitate comprehensive needs assessments to develop strategies to address the mental and behavioral health needs of their school communities.
- School psychologists support the implementation of evidence-based efforts to prevent school violence, improve school safety, and foster safe and supportive learning environments.
- School psychologists improve quality and effectiveness of family engagement and school community mental health partnerships.
- School psychologists provide counseling to individual students and groups of students.
- School psychologists provide mental health first aid, and they provide professional development related to student mental and behavioral health to school staff.
- School psychologists implement suicide and violence prevention policies and practices, including suicide risk and threat assessment.
- School psychologists provide culturally responsive counseling to students.
- School psychologists consult with administrators, teachers, and staff to increase knowledge and use of culturally competent practices.

Key Message: High school psychologists to student ratios and shortages prevent school psychologists from providing mental health support all children need.

- It is recommended that there be 1 school psychologist for every 500-700 students
- The current national ratio is 1:1,382; with some districts have one school psychologists for every 3,000+ students.
- Shortages result in
 - Limited access to mental health services for students;
 - An inability to provide preventative and early intervention services; and
 - An over emphasis on special education compliance

Key Ask

- A comprehensive approach to reaching the recommended ratio and addressing shortages includes:
 - filling existing available positions,
 - increasing the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) school psychologist positions,
 - coordinating with local universities to offer high quality practicum and internship sites,
 - finding ways to reallocate existing school psychologists' time (e.g., reduce paperwork) so that they are able to provide more mental supports,
 - implementing the NASP Practice model, and
 - ensuring a competitive salary and benefit package to recruit and retain high quality school psychologists.

Related Resources:

- NASP White Paper: School Psychologists: Qualified Health Professionals Providing Child and Adolescent Mental and Behavioral Health Services, <https://www.nasponline.org/x32089.xml>
- NASP Position Statement: Mental and Behavioral Health Services for Children and Adolescents, <https://www.nasponline.org/x26827.xml>
- School-Based Mental Health Services: Improving Student Learning and Well-Being, <http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/mental-health/school-psychology-and-mental-health/school-based-mental-health-services>
- School-Based Mental Health Services Promote Academic Success, <http://www.nasponline.org/x28294.xml>
- Trauma-Sensitive Schools, <http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/mental-health/trauma-sensitive-schools>