Dear Advocate,

This Policy Playbook was created to provide tips, advice, and best practices on how to fulfill one of the most important aspects of being a school psychologist: advocacy. Our association promotes both legislative and professional advocacy. Both are equally important to advancing advocacy goals. This playbook is organized to provide examples of both, but information may be applicable across sections.

Information contained in the playbook can be used by state associations or individuals seeking to engage in advocacy at the local, state, or federal levels. It is not all-encompassing, but rather it provides a starting point of suggested advocacy work. We urge you to consider the current context and climate of your community as you determine what actions to take to tackle the pressing issues facing your school communities.

NASP has a slew of leaders ready to help you and your association reach its advocacy goals. The NASP Government and Professional Relations Committee (GPR) works to provide assistance to states on advocacy and public policy activities (including grassroots and/or advanced advocacy training), professional development focused on educating school psychologists about key policy and advocacy initiatives, and much more. There are two representatives from each region on the committee, in addition to the Chair, Cochair, and NASP staff members.

NASP is dedicated to your success as a school psychologist and advocate. Thank you for the work that you do, day in and day out, to make a difference in the lives of children and communities.
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Part I: Basic Advocacy and Communications
Effective communications and advocacy are vital to achieving the goals and objectives of school psychology, whether you are trying to improve services at the building level, secure funding at the state level, or shape policy at the federal level. At its core, advocacy is about getting others to understand an issue from your perspective and then take appropriate action. This requires knowing what you want to communicate, how, and to whom. There is a fairly straightforward process for this that involves understanding the context within which you are trying to create change, knowing the key stakeholders in moving change forward, and developing effective messaging.

**Tips for Effective Communication**

Developing clear, effective, and memorable messages is critical to effective communications. Identifying your most important message depends on your specific goals and your target audience. However, there are a few global issues that reflect contemporary practice in school psychology. This framework can generally be used for all advocacy communications—whether your audience is the general public or a legislator.

**Identify your target audiences.** There is no “general public.” Messages, even on the same issue, should be tailored as narrowly as possible to the specific audience because each issue has different concerns and perspectives.

**Know your audience.** *Everyone* filters information through their own experiences. Being able to present your views in terms your target audience understands will help you get the most out of your interaction. It’s important to understand their level of knowledge/awareness, their primary concerns, expectations, or perspective on the issues, any issues they might have understanding, and their ability or likelihood to take action.

If you are communicating with an elected representative or their staff, it is important to research their background. Prior to your communications with the member, you should be able to answer the following questions:

- What party do they belong to?
- What committee(s) do they sit on?
- What is their legislative record on the issues I care about?
- What issues do they care about?

Basic information on your representative (their committees, party affiliation, etc.) can be found on the state’s legislative website on your member’s page, or through a quick Google search. You can find information on your representative’s stance on various issues via their campaign website. Identifying a member’s voting record can take a bit more digging into state legislative websites (searching for specific bills, etc.), but websites (such as Ballotpedia) outline federal votes on key pieces of legislation. Further, many interest groups also rate Members of Congress regarding their support (or lack thereof) for certain issues, which can be found on the group’s website.

Be sure to also prepare messaging to address opposing messages. Be aware of counterpoints that may come up as you advocate and be prepared to respond—especially if you know a certain group may be opposed to your goal.

**Focus on your objective.** What specifically do you want to accomplish? This could include raising awareness of a specific issue or your role/value, increasing your involvement/effectiveness on an issue, building support for specific policy/resource needs, expanding your leadership role, or encouraging parents/teachers/students to act.
Goals of key messages are to: Get people’s attention, connect to a priority, minimize suspicion/ reactive rejection, engage in a discussion, and be easy to remember. Remember: Key messages can’t convey every single point you hope to make.

Be clear and concise. Determine your main point, state it at the outset, repeat it, conclude with it, and back it up with 2–3 facts. Most people will only remember 2 or 3 points in any communication. The general rule of thumb is to keep your “ask” to less than 5 minutes—whether you are presenting at a meeting or typing 5 minutes worth of text for a staff person to read. Some tips include:

- Provide concrete actions/suggestions.
- Use audience appropriate language; avoid acronyms and technical language.
- Use active tense and bullets to the extent possible.
- Ask a colleague to review or proof your work.
- Briefly describe your role/relevant skills. Remember that you are especially important to your elected officials because you are a constituent and/or expert, and because you have a unique view of the effects of proposed state/federal policy or legislation.

Use effective message structure. The direct relationship between problem, action, benefit is critical to comprehension.

- Problem (the issue you are trying to help address)
- Action (what you suggest can be done; your role in doing it)
- Benefit (improved outcomes; don’t forget to identify how teachers, administrators, and families could benefit, as well as students)

Resonate

- Connect with your audiences’ concerns/priorities.
- Appeal to emotion as well as intellect.
- Use “social math,” not just statistics.
- Put a “face” on the issue. Tell stories, not just facts. Be a good listener.
- Create a clear “call to action.”
- Don’t expect your target audience to guess what you need.

For examples of strong key messages, be sure to check out the key messages documents at the end of this playbook for each topic area.

Working With Stakeholders

One of the keys to being a successful advocate is by developing effective and productive relationships with key stakeholders. For any given effort, it’s important to identify allied and opposing stakeholders, and how you might communicate with them to ensure that your effort is successful. Stakeholders include anyone you serve, work with, rely on, and/or disagree with, including, but not limited to: members of your local education system (e.g., administrators, teachers, other specialized instructional support personnel, students), local or state education leaders (e.g., your state or local education board leaders), members and leaders of local/state/national organizations, the media, and the community at large.
Here are some helpful tips for working with key stakeholders:

1. **Identify and research.** Review facts about them including their involvement in education and with other community organizations and issues of personal importance. Determine who may support your advocacy goals and who may be opposed. Make sure you understand the role each person or group plays in the process; this will dictate how you approach certain topics with them.

2. **Communicate.** Whether you’re advocating with a classroom teacher, a principal, the superintendent of your school district, or a legislator, it’s important that you keep your conversation topical and that your asks are reasonable. Building relationships with stakeholders requires communicating even when you don’t have a specific ask. Offer to be a resource on improving school and student outcomes (e.g., the connection between school climate, safety, and learning). When relevant, provide a brief written summary of research, data, and other information. Periodically check in and ask if you can be of assistance on any issue they are working on. Feel free to use NASP fact sheets, position papers, brochures, and other information to support your work. You don’t have to be their best friend, but having strong working relationships with stakeholders can be helpful to your advocacy efforts.

3. **Ask.** When the time comes to work together, it is important that you clearly articulate the purpose and specific actions expected of the partnership with the key stakeholder(s) and how the work relates to your shared goals. Be sure to keep the positive impact on outcomes for students and the stakeholder’s constituents as a focus of your advocacy.

**Working With the Media**

Working with the media can be a key component of any advocacy effort. There are a few ways you can utilize the media to get your message out to a broader audience.

- **Press releases** are factual, informational announcements about events, awards, programs, studies, accomplishments, etc. They generally come from an organization, as opposed to an individual; convey who, what, where, when, and why; and are distributed to multiple media outlets at the same time. An effective press release can easily be turned into a short article. You would use this if you were a part of an organization planning an advocacy day or letter writing campaign.

- **Op-Eds** are opinion pieces published in a newspaper but written by someone who is not on that newspaper’s editorial staff. They are usually 500–800 words written by someone with subject matter expertise in an area of public interest.

- **Letters to the Editor** are brief, directed responses to a story that has been or is being covered in the newspaper and usually run on the paper’s official editorial page. They are very short (150–250 words), come from an individual (not an organization), and almost always convey a local perspective. You can use a letter to the editor to respond to a specific news article or column, to share your perspective/expertise, to point out or correct an error, to reinforce a point, and/or to reflect on the significance of an event.

Regardless of how you interact with the media, it is important to remember these simple guidelines:

- **Think local.** Start with your local papers. Major papers are inundated with submissions of all kinds and are very difficult to break into.

- **Be relevant, clear, concise, and accurate.** When writing for print, make sure your topic is relevant to the community. Try to tie in a local angle to help the audience connect personally with the story. Avoid meandering sentences and using acronyms. This will help you keep the audience’s attention. ALWAYS make sure to check (and double check!) your facts and sources of information.
• **Understand your audience’s perspective.** Even when trying to convey the simplest information, you will be much more effective when you consider why people would care, what is in it for them, what role they may play in the problem/solution, and how the solution or information you are presenting meets their needs.

• **Identify the preferred method of submission.** E-mail has become the primary means of submitting written work to media outlets. Most outlets will not accept e-mail attachments, however, so be sure to paste your draft into the body of the e-mail.

• **Submit the piece to the right person.** Press releases generally go to the news or metro editor or desk. Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds would go to the editorial/opinion page editor. This information may be available on the website; if not, simply call the main number for the newspaper and ask for the person who handles the topic or type of piece you are submitting.

**Using Social Media**

Social media outlets—such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram—are spaces where you can stay up to date and informed on the latest news and trends, including staying connected with community stakeholders, colleagues, and elected officials. They also provide unique opportunities to start a dialogue, share information, and inform people in your network about issues impacting your school(s), students, and community. Here are a few tips for effectively using social media as part of your advocacy efforts.

**Complete your profile.** Having a photo and a complete profile on social media is extremely important. It shows that you’re a real person and adds a human element.

**Identify who and what to follow.** You want to be following the right people and organizations to effectively use social media. It’s important that you follow people who are active in your state and local politics or education scene. To start, do a little research and find community education activists or organizations, local reporters or news outlets, researchers and other professionals in your field, and elected officials who are active on social media and follow. Also, some platforms (like Twitter and Instagram) let you track hashtags—utilize this by finding your state’s political hashtag, city/town hashtag, and other relevant ones and follow them. Often people will use these hashtags to contribute to the conversation about a specific topic and if you’re following these hashtags you might discover new people to follow and interact with.

**Be social.** It sounds simple, but an overlooked component of social media is interacting with other people’s content. It is one way you to share your message with others and to grow your followers. The more followers you have, the greater impact your content has, and one way to grow a following is by interacting with others. The content you’re interacting with doesn’t necessarily have to be related to what you’re advocating for. If someone posts an inspirational quote that you like, comment on it and/or share it! If you see a Twitter chat happening on a subject you’re an expert in (e.g., school safety), participate! An example of how this can work can be found [here](#).

**Personalize and use visuals or links when possible.** Do not rely on auto-generated content. Consider revising and personalizing any content someone asks you to share. Also, posts that include videos, photos, and links perform better than posts with just text. If you’re talking about things topical to school psychology, share a link to any of NASP’s or your state association’s resources on the topic.

**Plan, if you can.** You’re busy and sometimes you might not even think about using social media as part of your day-to-day activities (and it doesn’t have to be). But it’s important to be active and participate when you can. As much as you can, use platforms like Buffer or TweetDeck to schedule content that you want to share. Some examples of this are if your association is hosting an advocacy day or if you find an interesting article.
you want to share with your followers. If you plan scheduled posts, make sure they will still be topical when you plan on sharing them and do your best to make sure they’re appropriate in the event something happens.

**Consider your social media an extension of your personal/professional life.** You are not and should not be anonymous when you’re on social media. A good rule of thumb is to not say anything to someone on social media that you wouldn’t say to them in person. *This includes oversharing and ad hominems.* Think of social media as participating in a conversation with someone on the street—you wouldn’t unnecessarily annoy them or personally attack them (the Internet is forever!). *Remember, there’s always a person on the other end of the conversation.*

Additionally, *avoid sharing information that could give away the identity of a student or teacher you’re working with.* Even on social media, you’re an employee of a school system and could be open to scrutiny from administrators, colleagues, and even the media.

**Patience is key.** Building a following takes time, so don’t get frustrated. And if you find social media for advocacy complicated or you’re not tech savvy, *it’s ok to decide that using it is not for you.* You should also feel free to take little steps towards becoming a full-fledged advocate on social media. Consider keeping (or making) your account private and following along with the conversation happening. Once you’re more comfortable using the platforms, you can make your profile public.
Part II:

The Basics of Legislative Advocacy
Legislative advocacy refers to efforts to influence the introduction, enactment, or modification of legislation. The process by which legislation is enacted into law is fairly cumbersome in the United States Congress and individual states, and it can take years to enact new legislation or even to modify an existing law. This is not necessarily a bad thing; even minor changes in state or federal law can have significant and far reaching consequences.

**Who Are My Elected Representatives?**

In the U.S. Congress, almost every person has one House Representative and two Senators. House Members represent specific districts and Senators represent the entire state. The structures of state legislatures vary, but in most states (with the exception of Nebraska, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico), every resident is represented by one member of the House (often called Assemblyman/woman or Delegate) and one member of the Senate.

You are relevant to your Representative or Senator because you live or work in the area they represent. In fact, one of the most common questions heard in a Congressional office is “are they from the district?” [NASP’s Advocacy Action Center](https://www.nasponline.org) allows you to identify your federal and state representatives by entering your zip code.

**The Legislative Process**

The U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives each have unique rules and legislative calendars by which they operate. Additionally, each state has its own unique committee structure, rules, and procedures, as well as how they refer to state legislators (e.g., Delegate, Assemblyman/woman) how often they meet, and the length of their legislative session. If you plan to engage in legislative advocacy, it is important that you familiarize yourself with the general rules of your state legislature. However, despite the nuances of each state’s operations, there are some key steps to understanding the legislative process.

1. Legislation can only be introduced by a member of the U.S. Congress or a member of the state legislature. Anyone can share ideas for legislation with elected officials, but legislation can only be introduced by a member of the legislative body.

2. Based on the primary topic of the legislation, each bill is referred to one or more Committees and/or Subcommittees that maintain jurisdiction over the topic the bill is hoping to address. Bills are referred to committees within the same body in which they were introduced. For example, in the U.S. Congress, bills introduced in the House are sent to House Committees and Subcommittees, and bills introduced in the Senate are sent to Senate Committees and Subcommittees. It is important to understand which committees have jurisdiction over the topics you and your state association care about.

3. The Committee/Subcommittee determines which legislation to formally consider. Often, committees/subcommittees will hold public hearings where witnesses can provide written or oral testimony about the benefits or negative consequences they believe the proposed legislation will have. Not every bill referred to a committee will get a hearing; in fact, the vast majority of legislation introduced in a given legislative session will never get a hearing. It is important that you provide oral and/or written testimony so that lawmakers understand your perspective and why you support or oppose a piece of legislation.

4. Generally speaking (there are always exceptions) before a bill can be voted on by the full body in which it was introduced, the Committee will hold a formal session referred to as a “mark-up.” In a “mark-up” session, the various members of the Committee introduce amendments that outline specific changes they would like to see in the proposed legislation. Each change is discussed and voted on.
5. The Committee then votes on the entire bill. If a majority of members vote in favor of the bill, it can be sent to the entire legislative body in which it was introduced. If a majority of members vote against the bill, the bill “dies” and will not be considered further during the current legislative session.

6. House and/or Senate leadership determine which bills are considered by the entire body. A very small percentage of bills that are voted favorable out of committee are actually voted on by the entire legislative body. If the bill is considered “on the floor” of the full body, then each member votes for or against passage of the bill. In the U.S. Congress (and some state legislatures), the complex operating rules of the Senate and House make floor action quite different in each body.

7. After the bill is passed in one body (either the House or Senate), the other body has to consider the same bill before it can become law. Not every bill passed by one body is considered by the other.

8. If both bodies have passed the same legislation with minor differences, they resolve those differences in a conference committee (a special committee formed to resolve difference in House and Senate passed bills). Conference committees produce a conference report that contains all of the changes negotiated between the two bodies. Unlike regular legislation, conference reports cannot be amended; they either pass or fail exactly as reported from conference committee.

9. Once both bodies have passed the exact same versions of the legislation, the bill is sent to the President or Governor for signature or to be vetoed.

**Understanding What a Legislator’s Office Can Do for You**

Your Congressional/State Legislative office can only help you out if you ask. Although there are some things they may not be able to do for you, below are some ways that your Representative can be helpful.

- Introduce legislation to change an existing law or create a new one, or cosponsor existing legislation introduced by someone else.
- Vote for or against legislation being considered by the Committee he or she serves on.
- Vote for or against legislation being considered on the House or Senate floor.
- Send a letter to a federal/state agency about a concern you may have with a particular agency action.
- Send a letter in support of a federal/state grant application you have made.
- Send a letter to an influential member of the legislature, such as a Committee chair or a member of the leadership, about a particular issue you may care about.
- Facilitate a meeting between you and federal/state agency officials to discuss an agency action you may have concerns about.
- Help answer your questions and solve your problems with individual government programs.
- Help you find government reports and request copies of reports from various government research organizations.

**Where the Action Is: Staffers**

A state/federal legislator’s staff is his or her lifeline to the world. They are generally young, energetic, and smart. Staffers do the bulk of the work and often have more time than the legislator to spend really learning and understanding the issues. Many staff members (especially senior staff like the Chief of Staff, Legislative Director, or Legislative Assistants) carry great influence with their boss, and legislators often rely on staffers when determining how to vote on a particular issue. It is important that you develop relationships with these staff members, and in some cases these relationships can be more valuable than the relationship with the actual legislator.
Selecting a Method of Communication

Always think about the method of communication that works best with your message. If it’s a quick, “Please vote yes on H.R. 1” message, a phone call is probably appropriate. Longer messages about the value of particular legislation lend themselves better to e-mails or meetings; however, if you are participating in a coordinated campaign for or against a particular piece of legislation, flooding phones tends to be more effective than e-mail.

Your communication is going to be filtered through a staff person, regardless of the medium. The best way to make sure your message is noticed is to make a personal phone call and ask for the staff person who is handling your issue (e.g., the health staffer or the education staffer). Phone calls are especially important for time-sensitive issues (e.g., Congress is planning to vote on a bill that impacts school psychology tomorrow). The second best way to ensure your message is noticed is through an e-mail identifying yourself as a constituent. Remember, Members of the House of Representatives have no duty to assist citizens who are not residents of their home districts.

Overall, though, how you communicate, whether by e-mail or phone call, is less important than what you say. Work more on the CONTENT of your message, as opposed to the delivery mechanism. If possible, use anecdotes from your Representative’s district.

Be Patient; Follow Up

It takes sales people an average of 13 tries with a prospect before making a sale, and Congressional/state legislative offices offer similar challenges. Consider the multitude of asks from diverse groups across industries that legislators are bombarded with. What you can do to make your message stand out? Be both patient and persistent; don’t be discouraged if Congressional/state legislative offices ignore your first request for a specific action. Offices are often juggling numerous competing priorities and a lack of response should not be interpreted as lack of caring. If you don’t hear back after your first request, reach out again to (a) remind the office of your original request and (b) demonstrate that you are serious. Be persistent and keep asking until you get an answer!

Following up after your meeting is just as important as the meeting itself. It can be easy for legislators or their staff to forget about your issue when they have so many other important bills and topics to worry about. You should e-mail the legislator and/or the staff member that you met with shortly after your meeting, thanking them for taking the time to meet with you. Be sure to include any clarifying information and additional materials that the office requested during the meeting. Continue to follow up with the legislator and their staff throughout the session as needed as the bills you are working on move along in the legislative process.
Part III:

Activating Your Grassroots: Tips for State Associations
Tips for Member Organization and Engagement

Advocacy is a marathon, not a sprint. Change, whether you are seeking to change a piece of legislation or to change a practice in your district, takes time. Your grassroots (members of your organization, family members, and all individuals interested in your issue) are your most valuable resource in promoting change. It is imperative that you maintain the following as you seek to advance your legislative or professional goals.

- **A Grassroots Network of Supporters.** Remember, there is power in an organized group of people. If you want legislators to pay attention to your issue, you need to organize a critical mass of support (or opposition), and make your legislators understand that this issue is important to their constituents.

- **Strong Relationship with the Media.** Because you are an organization with a mission statement, purpose, and policy agenda, the media will often look to you to respond to various events, policy/practice proposals, and pieces of legislation. Developing relationships with members of the media can be key to getting your message out in the public view. When an issue comes up that is in your “lane,” they should know to contact you for a response. Writing op-eds is another way that you can work with the media to increase the visibility of your message. Your organization can also be sending press releases/responses to members of the media when important events happen in your field.

- **Social Media.** The beauty of online activism is that there is no hiding. Social media has allowed for a new age of transparency and powerful communication with your elected representatives for everyone to see. Use it.

- **Coalitions.** Finding other like-minded organizations working on the same issue will only help you to increase your people power and the skills, resources, and information available to you.

**Activating Supporters**

Your goal is to apply enough pressure on the targeted stakeholder (e.g., legislator, school board member, superintendent) to the point that they feel if they vote the opposite of what you’re asking, their job could be threatened the next time they’re on the ballot in an election. Building a large amount of collective support behind an issue can be hard and take a lot of time—but it’s possible, and it’s worth it to advance your initiative.

Here are some tips to get you there.

- **Educate your members and supporters on the issue.** Perhaps the most important part of building a grassroots movement is to build a baseline of educated supporters, who can effectively articulate the benefits of what you’re asking for, and address any counterpoints. Building a core group of supporters will help you significantly as you build capacity.

- **Build a coalition.** Consider: Are there other organizations in your community with similar concerns who might work with you? Are there national organizations working on the issue that you can tap for intel and research? What strategic partnerships can you make to build your numbers and connections? Coalitions that are diverse and include groups from particular communities (e.g., women’s rights, people with disabilities, LGBTQ, people of color) may draw particular interest.

- **Build relationships with important stakeholders.** As you are building your grassroots movement, one of the most important things you can do is build relationships with legislators and staff, and other key stakeholders who support you and your issue. They can give you “inside information” on obstacles you may face and how you can get around them. Additionally, getting support on your initiative from leaders in your community—school board members, principals, or the superintendent, for example—can be helpful as you apply pressure to legislators (or whoever your target audience is). Finally, building relationships with local reporters can also be helpful in the long run, as they may choose to report on the advocacy work that you’re doing and how your initiative is advancing.
• **Demonstrate your critical mass.** You can tell your legislators that there is support behind an issue, but they probably won’t believe you unless they see it. There are a number of strategies you can espouse to demonstrate support for the issue, from petitions to events (such as hill days/virtual hill days/sending letters to legislators) to leveraging social media. Build a public presence for your issue; write op-eds/letters to the editor in your local newspaper, write to your congressional delegation, host a town hall on the issue at your school, and talk to teachers and administrators at your school and in your district about why what you’re doing is important for kids. Effective advocacy is all about storytelling; on social media, share stories from parents, students, and school psychologists that the policy change would impact. Effectively present evidence of how the policy has worked in other states and districts. The possibilities are endless!

**Key Considerations for Legislative Advocacy**

**Tracking State Legislation**

It is important that the state association (via a volunteer leader or paid lobbyist) keep track of the various pieces of legislation introduced in the state that could impact your legislative goals or the practice of school psychology. Each state’s legislative website has a way for the public to monitor activities of the state legislature, including pending legislation. In addition, NASP offers a **free service to its state associations** to assist in tracking relevant legislation at the state level. Having this information (when bills are submitted, marked up, or scheduled for a hearing) will help guide you on when the best times to communicate with offices about your bill.

**Planning Timely and Effective Communication With Legislators**

The timing of your communications with state and federal legislators is incredibly important. In state legislatures, representatives have the ability to file bills in advance of the start of a legislative session. If you hope for your bill to move along in the legislative process, approaching the representative’s office about a request to sponsor well before the start of a legislative session is a good idea, especially if you wish to collect cosponsors. Further, if you want your member to cosponsor a particular bill, asking for his or her support after the full House or Senate has voted on the bill is not effective. It is important to be mindful of the legislative calendar and the current bills being considered to help plan time timing of your communications. It is also important to be persistent. Most bills that are introduced do not become law, and for most legislation, the process can take years. If you fail to get a bill passed during one legislative session, try again next session. Legislators take notice when you have a sustained commitment to your advocacy.

**Executing Effective Grassroots Advocacy Campaigns**

There will be times when it will be imperative that legislators or other stakeholders hear from your grassroots about a specific issue. There are various ways to engage in effective grassroots advocacy campaigns and NASP can help. NASP offers free advocacy software for its state associations that allows them to easily set up letter writing and phone call campaigns and more. The software allows any participant to simply fill out a form with their name, address, etc., and an editable preloaded letter template and/or talking points will populate for advocates to take action. As the person who sets up the campaign, you are able to choose who the letters are sent to and who the calls are made to (state legislators, your states governor or agency heads, etc.) To set up a campaign, simply fill out this form, and a NASP staff member will contact you to set it up in our system.

After the campaign is set up in the system, NASP is also able to send you code for a “Take Action” button or for the form to be embedded on your association’s website.
Holding Effective Meetings With Legislators and Staff

When working with legislative staff on your various priorities, you can generally follow the communication tips outlined in Parts I and II of this playbook. When setting up meetings between your association’s leadership and staff, an additional consideration should be who you actually bring to the meeting, and who makes the various asks. There may be someone involved in your issue that has a good relationship with your representative or their staff. Or, there may be someone who is just generally better suited to deliver your message. For example, you may have one member who is very knowledgeable about a particular topic, even if they do not live in the legislator’s district. Additionally, given that your meeting may be short and you may not be able to get to get to all of the information and stories that you wanted to share, be sure to leave behind a packet of information and/or resources for the staffer(s) to read.

Developing Written and Oral Testimony

When a bill you or your organization supports (or opposes) is up for a hearing, it will be important for you to submit written testimony, or if possible, provide oral remarks. Whether you are testifying yourself or organizing oral testimony, be sure to check on the committee’s procedure for signing up to testify. In some other committees in other states, the chair will allow as many members of the public as would like to speak on the issue, as long as they stay within time constraints. Regardless, those testifying will have probably between 2–3, and certainly not more than 5, minutes to concisely convey why this policy change is important to them. Part I of this playbook has great tips to guide you through developing effective testimony.

Tips for Working With a Lobbyist

Some state associations find it beneficial to employ a full time lobbyist, or to contract with one when they are working on a particular issue. A state association can engage in effective advocacy with or without a lobbyist. Each state association needs to consider the capacity of their leadership and grassroots when deciding if hiring a lobbyist will help them meet their legislative goals.

What Is a Lobbyist?

A lobbyist is any person or organization retained, designated, or employed by a client to lobby on the client’s behalf. Lobbyists engage in various activities to garner support for legislative or regulatory change. The official definitions, laws, and regulations regarding lobbying differ by state. It is important to consult these regulations before making the decision to hire a lobbyist.

What Does a Lobbyist Do?

Lobbyists employed by state associations can provide singular or comprehensive services, depending upon the contracting arrangements. Possible activities include:

- Monitoring proposed legislation relevant to the organizations legislative platform.
- Monitoring regulatory changes and other relevant state agency activities.
- Promoting the state association’s legislative agenda.
- Direct lobbying (meeting with elected officials and asking for their support/opposition of an issue, disseminating advocacy materials on behalf of the association).
- Drafting legislation and finding sponsors for the legislation.
- Facilitating contact with other key stakeholders (teachers’ union, university trainers).
- Leading a grassroots advocacy campaign.
• Creating templates for advocacy letters that can be sent to elected officials by association members.
• Organizing “hill” briefings on topics important to the association.
• Organizing a “hill day” where association members go to elected officials offices to promote their legislative agenda including specific issues and bills.
• Providing updates about issues through communications with association board and members.

How Do We Go About Hiring a Lobbyist?

Suggestions for hiring a lobbyist:
• Use contacts with other education/mental health professional organizations to obtain lobbyist recommendations (e.g., school social workers, school counselors, teachers).
• Consider “sharing” a lobbyist with another allied education/mental health professional organization with interest in monitoring and advocating similar issues (a number of smaller states have successfully arranged this).
• Contact recommended lobbyists and invite them to an interview. Ask them to provide a résumé in advance of the meeting.
• Interview several candidates. Prepare interview questions that check their knowledge of school psychology, education, and other key issues; know what you want the lobbyist to do in advance of the interview; ask them to describe how they would plan to advance the issues of your association.
• Ask the potential lobbyist(s) to provide references and prepare a sample contract designating responsibilities as well as fees.
• Check references. Look for candidates who have good interpersonal skills, responsiveness to requests, knowledge of the issues, and contacts with specific legislators’ offices, committees, and other related organizations.
• Review the costs and benefits of each candidate. Consider experience, skills, contacts, and level of personal “compatibility” with board members.
• Offer a short-term contract initially, and only extend it if your association is satisfied with the services provided.

What Are the Benefits of a Lobbyist?

Lobbyists provide:
• Knowledge of the legislative/regulatory process.
• Increased visibility and consistent exposure to state association issues in the eyes of policy makers including elected officials and state department officials (e.g., education, health, mental health).
• A familiar contact person for elected officials and staff who need resources, information, or to discuss legislative proposals.
• Hot-off-the-press information about legislative happenings, enabling lobbyists to help state organizations stay informed and maintain a proactive position regarding issues impacting children, education, and families.
• Exposure, which may lead to inclusion of school psychologists’ perspectives in future legislation/policy and critical policy development activities regarding effective school safety and improving access to mental health supports for students.
Building Relationships With Legislators and Staff

One of the key components to being a successful advocate is to build and maintain strong relationships with members and their staff. This goes beyond a singular meeting about a specific bill and a follow-up thank you e-mail; if you want to be successful in your efforts, you want a member and/or their staff to continuously be thinking about your organization when issues that impact you come to their attention. This requires you to consistently engage with the office, even if they don’t always respond. This doesn’t mean that you need to have big meetings or breakfasts or events multiple times a year. Keep things simple and within your organization’s bandwidth! Consider:

- If your organization recently published a report relevant to the issues in your profession, send it to your member and/or their staff.
- If there is new research or resources emerging in the field of school psychology that you think might help the member and their staff understand trends in the profession, send it to your member and/or their staff.
- Add the legislator/staff member to the list of people who receive your state association’s newsletter.
- Drop off goodies or a bag of candy during the first week of the legislative session with a letter from your state association about school psychology and policy issues.
- Routinely check in with the office and ask if you can be of assistance to an issue they are working on.

As a general rule of thumb, aim to make contact with your target offices once a quarter, with exceptions for when there are issues and bills that are especially important to you and your organization.
Part IV:

Being a Good NASP Advocate
How to Be a Good Grassroots Advocate

School psychologists have an inherent and ethical responsibility to advocate for the students, families, schools, and communities they serve. Listed below are a few tips to being a good advocate.

**Respond to NASP Action Alerts.** At any given time, NASP will issue an action alert to bring your attention to an important piece of legislation or rule change that NASP is organizing member action on. In an Action Alert, NASP will generally ask you to visit the Advocacy Action Center to either submit a letter or make a phone call to your Congressional Representative and/or two Senators from your state. Action alerts are generally made on social media (@NASPonline on Twitter and Instagram; National Association of School Psychologists on Facebook) or, occasionally, via e-mail. Additionally, be sure to engage with your state association, who may issue action alerts around state policy proposals impacting school psychologists.

**Join our Rapid Response Team.** You may also opt to join our Rapid Response Team. By joining this network, you’ll receive a limited number of e-mails asking you to amplify NASP’s responses to various current events. Join now by simply filling out this form.

**Read Communiqué.** NASP releases its newspaper, Communiqué (CQ), for its members eight times each year. The purpose of CQ is to keep members informed about the activities of the Association and about the critical issues and current practices in school psychology. In each edition, there is a column dedicated to the current public policy issues in the world of school psychology. Be sure to read this content to keep you informed on what’s happening and how you can help.

**Read the Policy Matters Blog.** NASP’s advocacy team maintains a blog with consistent, up-to-date information on its advocacy efforts, in addition to guest posts from advocates across the country doing work in their own states. Bookmark the blog and check it regularly to stay connected, and contact NASP’s advocacy team to contribute.

**Check the Advocacy Action Center.** NASP’s Advocacy Action Center is the Association’s one-stop shop to advocate to your federal representatives for school psychology as a profession and issues that impact the kids and communities that school psychologists work with. At any given time, the Advocacy Action Center will have multiple policies that NASP is organizing its membership to advocate for or against. Be sure to bookmark and check this page regularly, as there will often be new opportunities for you to send letters or make calls for or against various policy proposals—and it won’t take more than 5 minutes!

**Join the Advocacy and Public Policy Interest Group.** As a part of NASP’s online community, there is an advocacy and public policy interest group designed to promote, discuss, and support the advocacy efforts of school psychologists across the country. You can join the interest group here.
Part V: Useful Terms and Definitions
**Action Alert**

An Action Alert is NASP’s terminology to bring your attention to an important piece of legislation or rule change that the Association is organizing action on. In an Action Alert, NASP will generally ask you to visit the Advocacy Action Center to either submit a letter or make a phone call to your Representative in the House and/or the two Senators from your state. Action alerts are generally made on social media (@NASPonline on Twitter and Instagram; National Association of School Psychologists on Facebook) or, occasionally, via e-mail. You may also receive action alerts from your state associations, asking you to log in to the Advocacy Action Center and contact your state representatives on an issue.

**Advocacy Action Center**

NASP’s Advocacy Action Center is its one-stop shop to advocate to your federal representatives for school psychology as a profession and issues that impact kids, schools, and communities. At any given time, the Advocacy Action Center will include multiple policies and/or bills that NASP is advocating for or against. Once you click on the link for a specific policy, a template letter will populate (for letter campaigns) or a list of talking points (for calling campaigns). Feel free to edit and personalize the messages as you see fit—they are meant to act as a guide for your message. Most actions in the Advocacy Action Center won’t take more than 5 minutes!

**Bill or Legislation**

Every change in a law or new law that a particular member wants to propose is offered in a written form called a bill. This is a specific written document that dictates exactly what provisions of law would need to be changed in order to make the policy change that is being sought. When the bill is introduced, it is given a number and assigned to a specific Committee for debate and approval. Usually, far more bills are introduced than laws enacted. Pieces of legislation are given a code in order to better track it, as thousands of bills are submitted in each session. In Congress, bills that start with “H.R.” (House of Representatives) or “S” (Senate) with a number attached to it (in order of submission) are proposals that would make an actual change in law and must be voted upon by both the House and the Senate and then signed by the President before being enacted.

**Chair/Ranking Member**

The member who leads a Committee. This person is always a member of the majority party. Both full Committees and Subcommittees have chairmen. Chairs, working with the party leadership, determine what bills they will consider. They cannot consider all the bills that are introduced in a given session. The Ranking Member is the leading member of the minority party on the committee, usually determined by length of service.

**“Congress” vs. the U.S. Congress**

Every 2-year period for which representatives are elected to serve is numbered and referred to as a “Congress.” For example, the 2-year period from January 2017 to December 2018 was the 115th Congress. Members who were elected or reelected in November 2016 served during this time. These designations apply to both the House and Senate even though not all individual senators are up for reelection every 2 years. The entire organization is called the U.S. Congress.

**Floor or Chamber**

Literally, the place where members of the House or Senate come together to debate bills. When a bill is “on the floor” it means that the bill is being actively considered, or debated, by the House or Senate membership. When a bill is “sent to the floor” it means that the bill will be considered by the members.
**GPR–State Liaison**

Government and Professional Relations Committee–State Liaison (formerly School Psychology Action Network) include one member from each state that works with their state association leadership, GPR Regional Coordinators, and NASP staff to share information to their membership about NASP’s advocacy activities (and vice versa).

**Grassroots/Grasstops Advocacy**

Advocacy activities are generally divided into two camps: grassroots and grasstops. Grassroots advocacy involves reaching out and organizing individuals to have them connect with their representatives about an issue that they care about. Grasstops advocacy is when the effort is focused mainly on organizational leaders, spokespeople, lobbyists, or others or are speaking out on behalf of a particular cause. Both types of advocacy are important and should be coordinated.

**Hill Day/Virtual Hill Day**

A Hill Day is an event where an organization coordinates participants to meet in person with their legislators and/or staff about the organization’s policy priorities and agenda, in order to lobby the member to support it. Similarly, a Virtual Hill Day is a Hill Day where participants send letters or make phone calls in support of the organization’s policy priorities and agenda.

**Party Leadership or Leadership**

Each party, whether the minority or the majority, has a small cadre of members who have been elected by their colleagues to assume responsibility for leading the party. These members are generally very powerful, especially the majority leadership, because they set the agenda and decide which bills will be considered by the entire House or Senate membership.

**SPAW**

School Psychology Awareness Week (SPAW) is a weeklong event in November where school psychologists work to increase visibility of the profession in their schools, communities, and government representatives. School psychologists plan various activities at their schools and participate in NASP’s annual Virtual Hill Day.

**Sponsor/Cosponsor**

The member who introduces a piece of legislation is the main sponsor. Once one member introduces a bill, other members may show their support by putting their names on the bill as a cosponsor. In general, a bill’s sponsor wants as many cosponsors for the bill as possible to give the bill a greatly likelihood of being passed.
Part VI:

Key Messages and Talking Points
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.

You can 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 improve 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 suffer from a mental health disorder, and roughly 80% of children and youth who are in need of mental health services do not receive them.
- Seventy to eighty percent 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 multitiere 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 communities and can engage in a broad range of partnerships to promote resiliency, wellness, school connectedness, and protective factors among students in collaboration with these 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.
• Creation of 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, and
  ▪ 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 one school psychologist for every 500–700 students.
• The current national ratio is 1:1,382; with some districts having one school psychologists for every
3,000+ students.

- Shortages result in:
  - Limited access to mental health services for students;
  - An inability to provide preventive and early intervention services; and
  - An overemphasis 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](https://www.nasponline.org/x32089.xml)
- NASP Position Statement: Mental and Behavioral Health Services for Children and Adolescents, [https://www.nasponline.org/x26827.xml](https://www.nasponline.org/x26827.xml)
- School-Based Mental Health Services Promote Academic Success, [http://www.nasponline.org/x28294.xml](http://www.nasponline.org/x28294.xml)
The nationwide response to the school shooting in Parkland, Florida represents a potential turning point in how policy makers are responding to calls for efforts to improve school safety and prevent school violence. The need for more school psychologists and other school-employed mental health professionals has been at the forefront of the national conversation, as has the need for more effective gun safety laws. It is imperative that we effectively use this momentum to increase the availability of school psychologists and access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services, and that we work toward implementing coordinated and comprehensive school safety efforts. Such efforts must address the continuum of school safety issues, not just the most rare, yet most highly publicized incidents like mass shootings. Addressing mass gun violence must include preventing access to firearms by individuals at risk of hurting themselves or others.

Your voice is critical to this advocacy. The following talking points reflect NASP policy and best practice. They can be used to advocate for:

- a comprehensive approach to school safety;
- increased access to mental and behavioral health services;
- improved ratios for school psychologists, as well as more effective use of existing school psychologists; and
- limiting inappropriate access to firearms.

You can 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 School Safety

Key message: Effective school safety requires a comprehensive approach that balances physical and psychological safety.

- Schools play a critical and irreplaceable role in keeping students safe and supporting mental health. Efforts to prevent violence must align with efforts to improve school climate, overall safety, and learning. These are not separate endeavors and must be designed, funded, and implemented as a comprehensive school-wide approach.
- School crisis prevention and intervention planning and training should reinforce students’ and staff members’ effective behavior in the event of an emergency, improve collaboration between the school team and emergency responders, and align with ongoing school safety and violence prevention efforts.
- We cannot turn our schools into barricaded fortresses. Balancing psychological and physical safety is critical. Overly restrictive measures can make students feel less safe and undermine the learning environment.
- Effective school safety efforts must include:
  - Positive climates that facilitate trusting relationships among students and staff and between peers.
  - Trained multidisciplinary school safety and crisis teams that regularly assess safety needs and response/recovery readiness.
- Positive approaches to discipline that don’t rely solely on exclusionary and punitive disciplinary practices.
- Availability and access to comprehensive mental and behavioral health services provided by school-employed mental health professionals (e.g., school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers) and strong school–community partnerships with community mental health agencies and providers.
- Trained school resource officers who are a part of the school safety and crisis team.
- Threat assessment/suicide risk protocols that include regular review.
- Clear and easily accessed systems (both anonymous and not) for students and others to report safety concerns and threats.

**Key message:** Lockdown drills are the gold standard in imminent threat or active shooter drills and should remain the centerpiece of options-based drills.

- Schools should consider the potential costs, benefits, and consequences of different approaches to active shooter drills.
- Drills should be considered in a hierarchy, with simple discussion-based exercises conducted before complex simulation-based drills are practiced.
- Effective active shooter drills do not require a full-scale simulation of an armed assailant attack, which can risk traumatizing students and staff.
- Children model their reactions from adult behavior, so effective drills should result in staff who inspire calm and confidence in students, and who reinforce effective decision-making in the event of a threat.
- Participation in simulation-based drills should be optional, should be appropriate to individual development levels, and should take into consideration prior traumatic experiences, special needs, and personalities.
- School-employed mental health professionals should be involved in every stage of preparation of all such drills and exercises.

**Key message:** Arming teachers may pose more risks than protections when it comes to school safety. Possession of a firearm should be limited to commissioned school resource officers with extensive law enforcement training and the sworn authority to enforce public safety.

Among potential risks are:

- An individual with a gun but not a uniform could be mistaken for the shooter.
- Firearm skills degrade quickly and require constant practice under high stress conditions.
- Having a permit to own a gun does not mean an individual is psychologically equipped to shoot another person in a high stress active shooter situation.
- Discharging a firearm in a crowded, chaotic school setting is extremely risky.
- The time and costs associated with training and arming school staff diverts critical human and financial resources away from strategies known to help decrease violent behavior and improve safety.

**Key message:** School psychologists play a critical role in creating safe and supportive learning environments that promote student well-being and learning.

- School psychologists develop, implement, and evaluate policies and practices that promote safe school environments for all students.
- They are critical members of school crisis prevention and response teams who:
  - develop and lead crisis prevention and response policy and practices at the district and school levels, including regular practice and review of safety plans;
  - assist with the recovery of students and staff after a crisis;
  - help evaluate the psychological trauma risk; and
- provide appropriate short- and long-term interventions and respond to demonstrated psychological needs of those impacted by a crisis.
- School psychologists conduct risk assessments (e.g., suicide and threat assessment), implement intervention procedures, and provide resources for students, staff, and families in need.
- They provide education for students, staff, and parents on the symptoms, warning signs, and risk factors of depression and youth suicide.
- They help promote a trauma-sensitive school environment that is responsive to the needs of the children and youth who have experienced stress, adversity, or trauma at home or in the community.
- They deliver professional development to increase school and staff capacity to improve school climate and safety.
- They foster effective collaboration with law enforcement, fire and rescue, outside mental health agencies, and cultural liaisons to improve coordination and efficient response and recovery.

**Key Asks**

- Sustained funding for comprehensive school safety and violence prevention efforts.
- Sustained efforts toward reducing the ratio of students to school psychologists and other school employed mental health professionals.
- Development and enforcement of positive discipline policies, including restorative justice practices and the prohibition of zero tolerance policies.
- Ongoing professional development for key members of the school safety and crisis response team (e.g., PREPaRE training).
- Requirement that each school maintain a school safety and crisis team comprised of principals, school psychologists (or other school-employed mental health professionals), school resource officers (or other school security personnel), and other school staff as appropriate.
- Requirement that all schools/districts have crisis and emergency preparedness plans that are consistently reviewed and practiced.
- Limits on which personnel are able to be armed in schools to commissioned school resource officers or other trained law enforcement officials.

**Comprehensive Mental and Behavioral Health Services**

**Key message:** Comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services improve student learning and safety.

- Ongoing access to mental health services promotes school safety by helping to create 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 to identifying students who may need more intensive services or for those who require immediate intervention.
- With appropriate treatment and early intervention, especially early intervention, people who experience adverse childhood experiences or struggle with mental health issues can lead rich, full, and productive lives.
- 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 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.

Key message: The vast majority of people with mental illness are not violent, and in fact, people with mental illness are more likely to be victims of violence than the perpetrators.

- Longitudinal research has concluded that:
  - less than 5% of the gun-related killings in the United States were perpetrated by people diagnosed with mental illness, and
  - less than 3–5% of U.S. crimes involve people with mental illness.

- In most cases, the presence of a diagnosable mental illness alone does not predispose someone to extreme or calculated violence. Implying so risks undermining the important efforts to reduce stigma around mental health problems and disabilities, and may discourage individuals and families from seeking appropriate treatment.

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 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.

- School psychologists facilitate effective communication and collaboration with community agencies/providers to support the availability of the full continuum of mental health services.

Key message: Sustainability matters. Recovery from a crisis is not an event but a process that can take a long time. When all of the initial outside responders go home, school-employed mental health professionals are still thereto 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 psychologists provide psychoeducation, consultation to school administrators, ongoing monitoring of students and staff experiencing or at risk for trauma reactions, and coordination with community services to support the immediate and long-term recovery from a crisis event.

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 providers.

Gun Safety Laws

Key message: Improving access to mental health services is important, but doing so is not a substitute for enacting gun laws that limit inappropriate access to firearms.

• A known risk factor for homicidal and suicidal behavior is access to weapons, including high powered firearms. Such access is known to be highly associated with increased risk of injury and death among youth. We need effective laws and policies that:
  - keep guns out of the hands of those who would hurt themselves or others,
  - limit access to weapons intended to cause mass destruction in a short amount of time, and
  - ensure that the only armed persons at schools are highly trained professionals, such as school resource officers.

• Homicidal behaviors are the result of a complex combination and interaction of risk factors that may be environmental, biological, or both.

• Although gun violence in schools is extremely rare, research indicates that the majority of youth homicides, both school-associated and non-school associated, are by firearms, and nearly half of youth suicide deaths involve the use of a gun.

• Armed school security is a local decision. Only school resource officers or other commissioned law enforcement officials should be armed on a school campus.

Key message: Efforts to prevent gun violence should not focus only on high profile mass shootings but should address the far more common issue of gun violence that some communities experience on a regular or even daily basis.
• According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 34,000 deaths result from gun violence each year, approximately two thirds of which—or 23,000—are the result of suicide.
• For youth ages 15–24, the gun homicide rate in the United States is 49 times higher than in other countries.
• Exposure to gun violence is highly associated with diminished social, emotional, and academic well-being among youth.
• Research indicates a clear connection between local availability of guns and gun-related violent behaviors, with estimates of close to 2 million children and adolescents having access at home to loaded, unlocked guns.

Key Asks
• Oppose efforts to arm teachers or to allow those with concealed/open carry permits to be armed on school grounds.
• Enforce background check requirements for all gun purchases to ensure that those who should not have access to a weapon are unable to purchase them.
• Implement and enforce extreme risk protection orders and other mechanisms that allow law enforcement to remove weapons from individuals who have been deemed to be a threat to themselves or others.
• Require significant training and gun safety courses to obtain a conceal/open carry permit.
• Implement and enforce efforts to ensure that weapons are properly stored and secured.
• Pass and enforce laws that ban assault weapons.

Improving Access to School Psychologists

Key message: Effective school safety measures require adequate access to school psychologists and other school-employed mental health professionals.

• 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, including ensuring adequate access to school psychologists.
• School psychologists are specially trained to provide mental and behavioral health services in schools. They are also skilled in consultation and connecting students with additional community services as needed.
• High ratios and shortages prevent school psychologists from providing mental health support to all children in need.
• Effectively addressing the school psychology shortage requires a comprehensive approach that 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, and
  ▪ ensuring a competitive salary and benefit package to recruit and retain high quality school psychologists.

Related Resources

• Resolution on Efforts to Prevent Gun Violence, https://www.nasponline.org/x40582.xml
• School Crisis Prevention and Intervention: The PREPaRE Model, [https://www.nasponline.org/professional-development/prepare-training-curriculum](https://www.nasponline.org/professional-development/prepare-training-curriculum)
There is a critical shortage in school psychology, both in terms of practitioners and in the availability of graduate education programs and faculty needed to train the workforce necessary to keep up with the growing student population. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends a ratio of one school psychologist per 500–700 students in order to provide comprehensive school psychological services. Current data estimates a national ratio of 1:1,381; however, great variability exists among states, with some states approaching a ratio of 1:5,000.

Shortages in school psychology, like shortages in other related education and mental health professions, have the potential to significantly undermine the availability of high-quality services to students, families, and schools. Shortages can include both an insufficient supply of qualified school psychologists and school psychologists from diverse backgrounds, graduate faculty, and qualified practicum and internship supervisors as well as an insufficient number of positions within districts to meet the needs of students. Consequences of the shortages include unmanageable caseloads, the inability for school psychologists to provide prevention and early intervention services or regularly consult with families and teachers, reduced access to mental and behavioral health services for some students, and limited scope of service delivery focused primarily on legally mandated special education practice.

Your voice is critical to this advocacy. The following talking points reflect NASP policy and best practice. They can be used to advocate for:

- improved ratios for school psychologists, effective use of existing school psychologists;
- increased efforts to recruit and retain school psychologist in hard to staff areas;
- the creation or expansion of university–district partnerships;
- expanded graduate education opportunities to increase the number of school psychologists entering the field;
- increase awareness about the field of school psychology; and
- improved representation in the field of ethnically, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse professionals.

You can select and adapt talking points to address the context of the shortages in your unique community. Talking points are organized by each broad issue and may overlap. Depending on the cause/impact of the shortages in 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 superintendent, school board, state/federal policy makers, and other relevant stakeholders. Related NASP resources containing additional, more in-depth information are provided at the end of this document.

Remedying the Shortages in School Psychology

Key message: The shortage of school psychologists is making it difficult to meet student needs.

- The NASP recommended ratio of school psychologists to students is 1:500–700; however, the national average is 1:1,382, with some districts having one school psychologist for every 3,000+ students.
- School psychologists are trained to provide mental health services in the learning context. Services include mental health screening, assessment, behavioral supports, counseling, referrals, suicide risk assessment, and threat assessments. Adequate ratios are necessary to ensure they can provide this broad range of supports to all students.
- School psychologists provide critical consultation to families, teachers, and administrators to help them
best meet the needs of students at home and at school. Critical shortages limit their availability to engage in this valuable work.

- Shortages result in unmanageable caseloads, an inability to provide preventive services and consultation with teachers, and too narrow a role for school psychologists who get limited to legally mandated special education compliance efforts.
- Expanding diversity within the profession will improve schools’ ability to meet the needs of students and families from racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

**Key message:** Effective school safety measures require adequate access to school psychologists and other school-employed mental health professionals.

- Providing ongoing access to mental health services promotes school safety by helping to create a positive learning environment in which students feel connected to their school community.
- 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 are specially trained to provide culturally responsive mental and behavioral health services in schools. They are also skilled in consultation and connecting students with additional community services as needed.
- School psychologists provide education for students, staff, and parents on the symptoms, warning signs, and risk factors of depression and youth suicide.
- School psychologists foster effective collaboration with law enforcement, fire and rescue, outside mental health agencies, and cultural liaisons to improve coordination and efficient crisis response and recovery.

**Key message:** Improving the ratio will help schools meet the comprehensive mental and behavioral health needs of students. (See Mental and Behavioral Health Key Messages.)

- One in five students will experience a mental and behavioral health concern, and research shows that students are more likely to receive mental health supports if the supports are offered at school. The shortage of school psychologists is limiting access to key mental and behavioral health services for some students.
- Comprehensive school mental and behavioral health service delivery systems must include adequate access to school psychologists and other school-employed mental health professionals.
- The continuum of school mental health includes promoting wellness, resiliency, skill building, and help-seeking behaviors. These are critical to student well-being and to identifying students who may need more intensive services or for those who require immediate intervention.
- High ratios and shortages prevent school psychologists from providing mental health support to all children in need.

**Key message:** Communities rely on schools to meet the needs of all students, as schools are where students spend a significant amount of time.

- School psychologists are uniquely positioned to facilitate the development, delivery, and monitoring of effective and evidence-based interventions to meet the academic, social–emotional, and mental and behavioral health needs of all students.
- Approximately 80% of students who need mental health supports do not receive them; the vast majority of those that do receive such supports receive them at school.
- Students are more likely to seek help if they know services, and service providers, are available at school.
School psychologists facilitate effective communication and collaboration with community agencies/providers to support the availability of the full continuum of mental health services and other supports to ensure all students are able to thrive.

Key Message: Improving the ratio allows schools psychologists to improve teachers’ ability to teach and support student learning.

- A major cause of attrition of teachers of students with emotional and behavioral disorders is lack of support from administrators, and researchers have cited school psychologists as having the professional expertise specifically needed to support these teachers.
- School psychologists can help reduce barriers to learning by assisting in the development implementation of comprehensive learning supports that help students progress through a rigorous curriculum and meet their individual learning needs.
- School psychologists are skilled in data collection and analysis and can help teachers design and implement evidence-based interventions that support student learning.
- School psychologists deliver professional development to teachers and other school staff to help improve capacity for effective classroom instruction and implementation of school-wide initiatives.
- School psychologists can help to support efforts to improve teacher wellness and prevent stress and burnout.
- Offer consultation and professional development to support teacher and staff efforts to infuse culturally competent practices into school-wide and classroom-based school improvement efforts.

Key Message: Improving the ratio of school psychologists helps promote a positive school climate and create a safe and supportive learning environment for all students.

- Adequate access to school psychologists facilitates improved delivery and integration of school-wide programming to foster school climate, prevent violence, and balance physical and psychological safety.
- School psychologists work with school leaders, teachers, other specialized instructional support personnel, and families to develop plans to support school climate and foster positive conditions for learning and foster trusting relationships among students and staff.
- School psychologists help develop and implement effective discipline strategies including positive behavior interventions and supports and restorative justice practices that apply behavioral principles to school-wide settings and offer support to individual students and groups of students.
- Improving school climate requires appropriate data collection and analysis. School psychologists have specific skills to evaluate, select, and interpret evidence-based school climate assessment tools that lead to meaningful school improvement.

Key Asks

- Consistent data collection of the number of FTE school psychologists employed at the district and state level to allow for targeted efforts to reduce the ratio in areas of greatest need.
- Sustained efforts toward reducing the ratio of students to school psychologists and other school employed mental health professionals
- Effective utilization of school psychologists in the school setting to include reallocation of existing school psychologists’ time (e.g., reduce paperwork) so that they are able to provide a broad range of school psychological services to all students.
- Improved coordination with local universities to offer high-quality practicum and internship sites.
- Maintaining a competitive salary and benefit package (including a stipend for the NCSP credential) to help recruit and retain high-quality school psychologists.
- Increase federal, state, and local funding streams to hire fully certified and/or licensed school psychologists, especially in high need and hard to staff districts.
- Implement or expand grant or loan forgiveness opportunities to increase the number of students entering and remaining in the field of school psychology.
• Create pathways to grant credentialing reciprocity for school psychologists across state lines, such as the Nationally Certified School Psychologist certificate, to help remedy the shortages in rural and other underserved areas.

• Restrict, minimize, or limit alternate or emergency credentialing that allows related professionals to supplant school psychologists when providing school psychological services.

Related Resources


For school psychologists, social justice is both a process and a goal that requires action. School psychologists work to ensure the protection of the educational rights, opportunities, and well-being of all children, especially those whose voices have been muted, identities obscured, or needs ignored. Social justice requires promoting nondiscriminatory practices and the empowerment of families and communities. School psychologists enact social justice through culturally responsive professional practice and advocacy to create schools, communities, and systems that ensure equity and fairness for all children and youth.¹

**Why it’s important.** NASP is committed to advocating for the civil rights, well-being, and educational and mental health needs of all students. This is accomplished by ensuring that all students are able to attend schools and live in communities that are safe, supportive, and free of bullying, harassment, discrimination, and violence. NASP opposes efforts that seek to systematically discriminate against or segregate children or youth on the basis of actual or perceived characteristics, including race, ethnicity, color, religion, ancestry, age, national origin, immigration status, socioeconomic status, language, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, cognitive capabilities, social–emotional skills, developmental level, chronic illness, or any other personal identity or distinguishing characteristic. Unfortunately, systematic discriminatory policies and practices continue to exist. However, school psychologists can play a critical role in leading important conversations and actions necessary to achieve equity for all students.

**Your voice is critical to this advocacy.** The following talking points reflect NASP policy and best practice. They can be used for:
- Building an understanding of race and privilege
- Supporting LGBTQ+ youth
- Supporting immigrant and refugee youth
- Addressing disproportionality in discipline and ending the school-to-prison pipeline

You can 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.

### Understanding Race and Privilege

**Key message: Racism and discrimination have severely negative mental health, academic, and social consequences for students of color.**

- Discrimination based on race is associated with poorer school attendance, lower self-esteem, higher rates of depression, and higher risk for suicide.
- Stereotypes often become self-fulfilling prophecies, resulting in lower academic achievement and negative outcomes.
- Black and Hispanic students are more likely to be enrolled at a school that employs a law enforcement officer but not a school counselor or other mental health professional.
- Black students are four times more likely to be suspended than White students for similar behaviors.

¹ Definition of social justice as adopted by the NASP Board of Directors, April, 2017.
- Children of color experience greater chronic stress, yet are significantly less likely to receive mental health care than their White peers.

**Key message:** Privilege and implicit bias often lead to educational inequity for students of color and students with disabilities.

- Long-standing research findings have documented that students of color are disproportionately placed in special education and subsequently spend less time in the general education environment.
- Educational disparities are linked to minority/majority status and contribute to large-scale achievement gaps.
  - On average, Black students’ test scores are roughly two grade levels lower than White students in the same district; Hispanic students are roughly 1.5 grade levels below their White peers.
  - Students with disabilities have scored and continue to score lower than their nondisabled peers on state and national tests. Sixty-seven percent of students with disabilities graduate from high school compared to the national graduation rate of 84.6%.
- The effects of implicit bias are seen as early as the preschool years, with Black students being suspended at much higher rates than White preschool students.
- Many students of color experience oppressions which are intensified when one accounts for how their race intersects with other identities they hold, such as socioeconomic status.

**Key asks:**

- Develop policies to establish and maintain racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity among school personnel.
- Develop pedagogical curricula and approaches (e.g., culturally responsive teaching practices) to incorporate race and an understanding of privilege at the classroom, school, and district levels.
- Implement research-based programs that reduce racial achievement gaps.
- Implement research-based strategies that mitigate the effects of racism, prejudice, and discrimination and result in resilience and educational excellence (e.g., restorative practices).
- Promote ongoing evaluation of institutional policies that may unintentionally contribute to negative outcomes for certain groups of students.
- Systematically evaluate student growth, grades, and test scores to ensure equity of educational access and achievement; implement interventions to address areas of disparity.

**Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth**

**Key message:** LGBTQ+ youth experience significantly higher rates of harassment, bullying, and discrimination than their heterosexual and cisgender peers, which can lead to safety concerns and contribute to a host of negative academic and social–emotional outcomes.

- Within schools, higher levels of victimization for LGBTQ+ youth are associated with poorer school attendance, lower grade point averages, fewer plans for postsecondary education, lower self-esteem, higher rates of depression, greater substance abuse, and higher risk for suicide.
- When LGBTQ+ youth develop in positive school climates, which include various supports such as a Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA), an LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum, comprehensive antibullying policies, and supportive educators, allies, and role models, they report greater physical and psychological safety and improved educational outcomes.
Some LGBTQ+ youth experience family rejection, which may include abuse, exclusion, being forced to leave home, or efforts to change a youth’s sexual orientation or gender identity, which is associated with higher risk for depression, self-injury, suicide, and substance abuse.

LGBTQ+ youth are highly affected by ever-changing shifts in social attitudes, public policies, and laws related to LGBTQ+ rights—especially youth living in communities that espouse more conservative religious, familial, and political values.

**Key message: Efforts to exclude or discriminate against transgender and gender nonconforming youth are unnecessary and harmful.**

- Among LGBTQ+ students, transgender students face the highest levels of victimization and discrimination at school and are most likely to miss school or change schools because of safety concerns. Furthermore, they are most likely to consider dropping out of school and encounter the highest rates of school discipline.
- Title IX of the Education Amendment Act of 1972 prohibits harassment of students on the basis of sex. Federal courts have affirmed that these discrimination protections apply to transgender youth and that schools have an obligation to affirm a student’s gender identity and grant them access to programs and facilities on the basis of their affirmed gender identity, not their biological sex.
- Comprehensive antiharassment policies that include protections for transgender and gender nonconforming students are helpful for all students because when one student feels unsafe, others question their own safety.
- Dozens of courts over the last two decades have affirmed the full rights and identities of transgender people as well as their need for protection.

**Key message: Conversion (or reparative) therapy is an unscientific, unproven, and unethical practice that harms LGBTQ+ youth.**

- Conversion therapy has been shown to worsen internalized homophobia; interrupt healthy identity development; increase depression, anxiety, self-hatred, and self-destructive behaviors; and create mistrust of mental health professionals.
- There is no valid or methodologically sound research that demonstrates sexual orientation change efforts are effective or beneficial to the person.
- Homosexuality is not a mental disorder, and thus, there is no need for a “cure.”
- Conversion therapy amplifies the shame and stigma that LGBTQ+ youth already experience.
- Parents may seek conversion therapy for children after witnessing the distress or mistreatment their child has experienced as a result of homophobic or transphobic commentary or action which can lead to feelings of self-doubt and insecurity. It is therefore necessary for school psychologists to inform parents of the dangers of conversion therapy and assist them in finding evidence-based mental health supports.

**Key asks:**

- Develop and implement comprehensive antibullying, harassment, and discrimination policies that specifically protect individuals based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
- Provide ongoing professional learning opportunities to educate school personnel about LGBTQ+ issues, to know how to recognize and intervene when LGBTQ+ related harassment and bullying occur, and to develop skills and strategies to serve as supportive allies.
- Implement policies that allow for GSAs on school campuses, which are mandated under the Equal Access Act.
• Support efforts to create a supportive school environment, including developing inclusive curricula in which appropriate and accurate information regarding LGBTQ+ people, history, and events are included, and creating gender neutral spaces, safe zones, and the ability for them to use the bathroom that aligns with their gender identity.
• Any effort to redefine sex under Title IX as solely irrevocably male or female at birth should be opposed.
• Conversion therapy should be banned in all 50 states.

**Addressing Disproportionality in Discipline and Ending the School-to-Prison Pipeline**

• Students of color, and students with disabilities, are disproportionately represented in exclusionary discipline consequences, such as suspension, expulsion, and referral to law enforcement. Such discipline in turn is associated with student dropout and entry into the prison system.
  ▪ During the 2015–2016 school year, Black students represented 15% of the total student enrollment, and 31% of students who were referred to law enforcement or arrested—a 16 percentage point disparity.
  ▪ Students with disabilities (IDEA) represented 12% of the overall student enrollment and 28% of students referred to law enforcement or arrested.
• Out-of-classroom suspension, which has proven to be ineffective in achieving behavioral change or stronger educational outcomes, was given to 2.7 million K–12 students in the 2015–2016 school year. Over 120,000 students received expulsions.
  ▪ Being suspended or expelled from school increases the likelihood of being arrested in that same month.
• Zero tolerance policies are ineffective and have not been proven to reduce violence or promote learning, and negatively impact a disproportionately large number of minority students.
• Positive approaches to discipline, including positive behavioral interventions and supports and restorative justice techniques, have been proven to address students’ misbehavior effectively.

**Key asks:**

• Develop policies that seek to end the use of harmful and ineffective exclusionary discipline practices.
• Promote the implementation of effective and positive discipline practices (e.g., PBIS, restorative practices).
• Support policies that hold schools and districts accountable for addressing disproportionality in discipline (e.g., disaggregating discipline data by race/ethnicity and disability status).
• Create MOUs that clearly outline the appropriate role of SROs and other school-based law enforcement, and explicitly prohibit their involvement in discipline.
Robust education investments are necessary to ensure a successful public education system. The vast majority of public K–12 spending in the United States—around 92%—comes from state and local sources. Approximately 8% of education funds come from federal programs, with Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act representing the two largest federal education programs. State funds generally support salaries of staff members, school operations and state-specific priorities while the federal programs are targeted for various types of students, schools and communities. These programs help address education needs and inequities that are often not able to be met by the state or local jurisdiction. Although some federal programs do allow for the hiring of school personnel, most personnel decisions are within jurisdiction of the state and/or local government.

Why it’s important. Quite simply, students cannot learn without strong principals, high-quality teachers, access to school psychologists and other specialized instructional support personnel, comprehensive learning supports, sound infrastructure, and current and evidence-based materials in their classrooms. Enrollment in our public schools has increased by more than 5 million children since 2005, and projections indicate that the number of children in our public education system will continue to increase. Despite increased enrollment, and the expansion of services and supports provided by schools, overall investment in education is only marginally higher than 2005 funding levels. Unfortunately, due to cuts at the local, state, and federal levels, schools have been forced to reduce or eliminate personnel, scale back the availability of support services, and reduce or eliminate instruction in physical education, the arts, and other subjects that contribute to a well-rounded curriculum. Creating a strong public education that meets the needs of all students requires robust investments at the local, state, and federal levels.

Your voice is critical to this advocacy. The following talking points reflect NASP policy and best practice. They can be used to advocate on the federal, state and local level for:

- increased investments to support our most vulnerable students,
- increased investments for students with disabilities,
- increased investments in professional development programs, and
- increased investments in well-rounded curricula and access to comprehensive learning supports.

You can 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.

Key message: Investments to target funding and support for our most vulnerable students in high-poverty schools are critical. The quality of children’s education, or their lives’ trajectory, should not be dictated by their zip code.

- For the first time in recent history, the majority of students attending U.S. public schools live in poverty.
- Ninety percent of the nation’s school districts and over half of all public schools participate in Title I programs; however, since the funding level has remained the same in the past few fiscal years, nearly half of the Title I-eligible school districts received a reduction in their grant allocation.
• Families and youth who have been displaced experience significant life stressors, such as events leading up to the displacement (e.g., natural disaster, war, or persecution), being cut off from family or friends, the uncertainty of finding a new home, and navigating the unfamiliarity of a new culture.
• Migrant students and students who live in poverty are at heightened risk of exploitation, human trafficking, and abuse. Families may also be limited in their ability to support their children because of their own trauma, disconnection from social networks, and financial strain.
• Educational disparities are linked to minority/majority status and contribute to large-scale achievement gaps.
  ▪ On average, Black students’ test scores are roughly two grade levels lower than White students in the same district; Hispanic students are roughly 1.5 grade levels below their White peers.

Key message: Students with disabilities must be afforded a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and held to high standards within a rigorous curriculum. Adequate education investments are necessary to meet this legal and ethical mandate.
• Approximately 13% of all public school students (6.8 million students) receive special education services and their civil right to a free and appropriate education.
• Students with disabilities must have access to highly qualified teachers, specialized instructional support personnel (such as school psychologists and speech pathologists), assistive technology or other needed equipment, and any other accommodation and related services necessary for them to access the general curriculum.
  ▪ IDEA Part B currently funds just 16% of these costs, far below the 40% promised when the IDEA was approved.
• Sixty-seven percent of students with disabilities graduate from high school as compared to the national average of 84.6%.
• Long-standing research findings have documented that students of color are disproportionately placed in special education and subsequently spend less time in the general education environment.
• Educational disparities are linked to minority/majority status and contribute to large-scale achievement gaps.
  ▪ Students with disabilities have and continue to score lower than their nondisabled peers on state and national tests.

Key message: Continued investment in professional development opportunities for school leaders, teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, and school staff is critical to providing children with a high-quality education.
• Schools are growing increasingly diverse and inclusive, with students of varying learning needs (including students with disabilities) being educated in the same classroom. It is imperative that our nation’s teachers have the skills to provide culturally responsive, high-quality instruction to all students.
• School psychologists and other specialized instructional support personnel provide critical direct and indirect services to children, teachers, and staff. They must have access to ongoing, relevant, and job-embedded professional development to allow them to continuously provide evidence-based comprehensive learning supports.
• Peer-led, evidence-based professional development supports high-quality educator instruction and mentorship programs that are designed to improve student learning and achievement.
• High-quality educator induction and mentorship programs can improve retention rates and reduce teacher burnout.
Key message: Investments that support access to well-rounded curricula, safe and healthy students, and the effective use of technology are critical components to a strong public education.

- Ensuring students have safe and healthy learning environments, access to physical education and mental health supports, and engaging learning opportunities like STEM, the arts, and music classes is crucial to their well-being and success in school.
- Evidence-based prevention programs, comprehensive school mental health programs (including early identification of at-risk students), efforts to prevent bullying and harassment, suicide prevention efforts, trauma-informed practices, and efforts to improve student behavior and school climate are critical to creating safe and supportive learning environments that support student learning.
- Evidence suggests a direct correlation between physical and mental health and learning that is essential to academic success, school completion, and the development of healthy, resilient, and productive citizens.
- Supportive school environments that promote connectedness, prevent negative behaviors, and proactively teach and reinforce positive behaviors and social skills create an atmosphere where students thrive, help to prevent bullying and harassment, and improve school climate.

Key asks:

**Federal Investments**

- Congress must:
  - Increase investments in Title I of ESSA to help mitigate the negative impact of poverty and support neglected and migrant youth in our nation’s schools.
  - Live up to its original promise from when IDEA was enacted of providing 40% of the excess cost of educating students with disabilities.
  - Continue to invest in existing professional development opportunities for teachers, specialized instructional support personnel and other school staff by supporting increases in Title I, Title II, Title IV of ESSA, and IDEA.
  - Fully fund Title IV-A of ESSA to allow for increased access to a well-rounded curriculum; support safe and healthy students; and increase the effective use of technology.
  - Maintain and expand programs that support a positive school climate, access to comprehensive school mental health services, and the availability of comprehensive learning supports.
  - Continue to fund federal research and technical assistance centers to equip schools and educators with the evidence-based tools they need to support the learning of all students.

**State and Local Investments**

- States and local school districts must:
  - Ensure that funding is distributed equitably to ensure that all students have access to the supports they need to be successful.
  - Maintain competitive salary and benefit packages to recruit and retain high-quality school leaders, teachers, school psychologists, and other specialized instructional support personnel.
  - Prioritize efforts and funding to address the root causes of poverty and help lift families and students out of the cycle of poverty.
  - Supplement federal investments with local funds to ensure every student has access to the comprehensive learning supports they need to be successful.
• Prioritize efforts to improve school safety, school climate, and comprehensive school mental health rather than viewing these efforts as ancillary.

Offer continuous, job-embedded professional development to school leaders, teachers, and specialized instructional support personnel. This should include funding (and time off) to attend professional conferences.