



## Key Messages and Talking Points to Remedy the Shortages in School Psychology

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 1:1381; however, great variability exists among states with some state approaching a ratio of 1:5000.

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 practica 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;
- expand graduate education opportunities to increase the number of school psychologist entering the field
- increase awareness about the field of school psychology
- improving representation in the field of ethnically, racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse professionals

**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.**

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- The NASP recommended ratio of school psychologists to students is 1:500-700; however, the national average is 1:1382 with some districts having one school psychologist for every 3000+ students.
- School psychologists are trained to provide mental health services in the learning context. Services include MH screening, assessment, behavioral supports, counseling, referrals, suicide risk assessment, 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)**

- 1 in 5 students will experience a mental and behavioral health concern and research shows that students are more likely to receive mental health supports if they are offered at school. The shortage of school psychologists is limiting access to key mental and behavioral health services to 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 teacher’s 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 curricula 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 psychologist 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

Shortages in School Psychology Resource Guide <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-psychology/shortages-in-school-psychology-resource-guide>

Shortages in School Psychology: Challenges to Meeting the Growing Needs of U.S. Students and Schools. [https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Resources%20and%20Publications/Resources/School\\_Psychology\\_Shortage\\_2017.pdf](https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Resources%20and%20Publications/Resources/School_Psychology_Shortage_2017.pdf)

Frequently Asked Questions about Shortages in School Psychology (Infographic) [https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Research%20and%20Policy/Shortages%20in%20School%20Psychology\\_QA\\_Infograph\\_Combo\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Research%20and%20Policy/Shortages%20in%20School%20Psychology_QA_Infograph_Combo_FINAL.pdf)