Trends in Graduate Education in School Psychology, 2015–2020

Eric Rossen
National Association of School Psychologists

Daniel Gadke
Mississippi State University

Sarah Valley-Gray
Nova Southeastern University

ABSTRACT

The Graduate Education Committee of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) has collected data regarding the status of graduate education in school psychology for both specialist and doctoral programs since 2010. This report highlights trends across a 5-year period from the 2015–2016 academic year through 2019–2020. The data highlight a generally positive outlook. The number of applicants, enrolled students, and graduates from school psychology programs continue to grow. The percent of minoritized students enrolled in school psychology programs has steadily increased over time as well. Additionally, more graduates than ever are estimated to enter the workforce, specifically in the school setting. However, these positive trends are almost entirely attributed to specialist-level programs; the data from doctoral-level programs indicate that the number of doctoral students enrolled, graduating, and working in schools has either remained the same or slightly decreased. Further, the number of available graduate programs overall (specialist-level or doctoral-level) remains generally stable with a slight increase over the 5-year period. This status quo may be insufficient to meet increasing demand for school psychological services coupled with an increasing pre-K–12 enrollment across the United States.

Keywords: graduate education, school psychology, graduate preparation, training, specialist, doctoral

The goal of graduate education in school psychology is to prepare practitioners who are uniquely qualified to provide evidence-based services to support the learning and development of school-age children. Tracking trends in graduate education is important to identify changes in enrollment, program requirements, and outcomes; movement toward a more inclusive workforce; and data related to personnel shortages.

Since 2010, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) has systematically collected data annually from graduate programs in the United States and its territories. These data summarize
enrollment, student outcomes, access to financial aid, and shifts in graduate education requirements. Since 2016, these data collection efforts have resulted in summative descriptive reports disseminated annually (see Gadke et al., 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, & 2022). This Data Brief highlights trends found within those reports from 2015–2020 and examines the following questions. Over the last 5 years:

- Has the number of school psychology graduate preparation programs and required credits remained stable?
- Have there been changes in the characteristics of graduate students in school psychology?
- Have there been changes in the number or employment of program graduates?

Results are organized by program-level data, student enrollment and characteristics, and program graduates and outcomes.

**PROGRAM DATA**

This section covers data related to program availability and program requirements.

**Known U.S. Programs and Institutions Offering a Program**

Figure 1 reflects known institutions or universities in the United States offering one or more graduate programs in school psychology, as well as the number of total programs that NASP has identified as resulting in either a specialist-level or doctoral-level degree in school psychology. The available data suggest general stability, with small increases in the availability of programs over the last 5 years. It is important to note that trends in known institutions offering a program may reflect changes in NASP’s awareness of a program’s existence rather than a legitimate increase or decrease in the number of programs.

**Figure 1. Known Programs and Institutions Offering a Degree in School Psychology**
Credit Hours Required

Figure 2 reflects the average reported credit hours required by programs to complete either the specialist-level or doctoral-level degrees. Average credit hours reported by doctoral programs show more fluctuation than specialist-level programs. In reviewing the most recent year of data, doctoral programs, on average, require 17% more credit hours than the 90 hours required by NASP (2020) standards, whereas specialist-level programs require 12.8% more than the 60 hours required by NASP (2020) standards.

Figure 2. Average Required Credit Hours by Program Type

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ENROLLMENT

Enrollment refers broadly to data on the population of graduate students in school psychology programs.

Applicants Per Program

Figure 3 highlights that specialist-level programs have seen an approximate 22% increase in average reported applicants per program in 2019–2020 compared to 2015–2016. Doctoral programs, in contrast, demonstrate an approximate 8% increase over that same period.

Total Enrollment Per Program

Figure 4 highlights average student enrollment, including interns. Specialist-level programs, on average, demonstrate an increasing trend of enrolled students, with an approximate 20% increase from 2015–2016 to 2019–2020. In contrast, doctoral-level programs report a 3% decrease in average enrollment during that same time period.
Figure 3. Average Applicants per Program, by Program Type

Given that not all programs respond to NASP’s data collection efforts, Figure 5 shows estimated enrollment, including total estimated enrollment and estimated enrollment by degree type, among all known school psychology programs in the United States and its territories, which was extrapolated by multiplying the averages of each individual variable by all known active school psychology programs in the United States by degree type. As noted in the average enrollment data from Figure 4, total estimated enrollment has steadily risen among specialist-level programs, with the most significant increase from 2018–2019 to 2019–2020, whereas doctoral level enrollment has remained relatively unchanged.

Figure 4. Average Total Student Enrollment by Program Type
Minoritized Students

Figure 6 represents the percentage of racially and ethnically minoritized students enrolled among total students, by program type. Data indicate a steady increase in the enrollment of minoritized school psychology graduate students in school psychology.

Figure 7 represents the estimated number of racially and ethnically minoritized graduate students (derived by extrapolation) enrolled in school psychology programs in the United States, total and by degree type.
As noted in Figure 6, enrollment of minoritized students in school psychology graduate programs continues to increase.

**Figure 7. Estimated Total Minoritized Students by Program Type**

![Graph showing estimated total minoritized students by program type from 2015-2016 to 2019-2020.](image)

Figure 8 indicates that the number of students in school psychology graduate programs identifying as male has decreased slightly from 2015 to 2020.

**Figure 8. Percentage of Male Students Enrolled Among Total Students, by Program Type**

![Graph showing percentage of male students enrolled among total students by program type from 2015-2016 to 2019-2020.](image)
PROGRAM GRADUATES AND OUTCOMES

This section refers to information on both the number of individuals completing and graduating from programs, as well as settings for initial employment immediately following program completion.

Program Graduates

Data suggest that specialist-level programs have increased the average number of graduates over the last 5 years, whereas the average number of graduates from doctoral programs has remain relatively unchanged (see Figure 9). This aligns with the findings that specialist-level programs have increased enrollment at a greater rate than doctoral programs.

Figure 10 represents the estimated graduates of school psychology programs (derived by extrapolation) in the United States, total and by degree type. Similar to the findings from Figure 9, the data show that significant increases in total graduates are almost entirely accounted for by specialist-level programs. Doctoral-program graduates have remained relatively unchanged.

Graduates Employed in Schools

Figure 11 reflects the estimated graduates employed specifically in school settings (derived by extrapolation) in total and by degree type, from 2016–2017 through 2019–2020. Data show that doctoral programs are generating fewer graduates that work in schools, whereas the increases in practitioners entering schools are mostly attributed to specialist-level programs.

Figure 9. Average Graduates per Program, by Program Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Specialist-level</th>
<th>Doctoral-level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-2018</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018-2019</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-2020</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 10. Estimated Total Graduates by Program Type

![Bar chart showing estimated total graduates by program type from 2015-2016 to 2019-2020.](chart10)

Figure 11. Estimated Total Graduates Employed in Schools, by Program Type

![Bar chart showing estimated total graduates employed in schools by program type from 2016-2017 to 2019-2020.](chart11)
HIGHLIGHTS

- From 2015–2020, the number of applicants, enrolled students, and graduates from school psychology programs continue to grow. This change is largely attributed to growth in specialist-level programs, whereas doctoral-level program enrollment figures remain relatively unchanged from 2015–2020.
- More new graduates than ever are entering schools upon graduation; again, largely attributed to increases in graduates from specialist-level programs.
- The percentage of minoritized graduate students in school psychology programs continues to increase, whereas the percentage of male students has decreased.
- The overall availability of programs remains generally stable.

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Data for this report are derived from the annual National School Psychology Program Database Survey. This survey is sent to all known institutions offering a graduate program in school psychology in the United States and its territories, and the portal to complete the survey is open for several months beginning in the fall of each year. Response rates for individual items range from approximately 50% to nearly 100%. Estimates were calculated across all variables using the known number of specialist and doctoral programs and the average number of students admitted and enrolled by programs that completed the survey. For example, the estimated number of total specialist level students in the 2019–2020 school year was calculated multiplying the total number of known specialist programs that year (i.e., 236) by the average number of reportedly enrolled specialist students per responding program that year (i.e., 37.3). Slight changes in the survey have occurred over time; thus, only data that have been collected consistently over the 5-year time period were included. Additional information on the methods and procedures, as well as individual reports from each academic year, can be viewed on the NASP website (see Gadke et al., 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, & 2022).

REFERENCES


