

## Guidance for Respecialization and Professional Retraining

For decades, educators in school psychology have used the term *respecialization* to reflect a formal process of changing specialties within psychology as a mechanism to address shortages (e.g., Crespi & Politikos, 2004). However, respecialization in school psychology has historically lacked a formal definition and consistent application. This created confusion about whether those in related education fields (e.g., school counseling) could also respecialize.

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) 2020 Professional Standards now provide specific guidance and definitions, using the term “respecialization and professional retraining” (p. 47). Specifically, the standards state that *respecialization and professional retraining* (RPR) refers to a process in which “candidates may achieve state credentialing as a school psychologist through an individualized program of study *that does not result in a degree in school psychology*.” In other words, RPR refers to the specific practice of enrolling students in a nondegree seeking program that leads to state certification or licensure only. Programs that enroll students from related fields that lead to a degree in school psychology would *not* fall under the definition of RPR; programs should continue this practice, and in fact it remains a preferred approach in most cases when compared to a nondegree seeking option, though it would not be considered RPR.

Further, the standards note that *respecialization* refers to “candidates who hold a graduate degree in another area of applied psychology (e.g., clinical or counseling psychology)” whereas *professional retraining* “refers to candidates who hold graduate degrees in related fields (e.g., special education, school counseling, or school social work).” Given that historically, respecialization has referred to changing recognized specialties within psychology, the NASP 2020 Professional Standards expanded the scope to include professional retraining. Despite these different definitions, the general process and recommendations for RPR remain the same. Regardless of model or approach, NASP believes that its *Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services* should serve as the guide for all graduate preparation in school psychology.

### DOES NASP RECOMMEND RPR?

Generally, no. NASP promotes the NASP *Standards for the Credentialing of School Psychologists*, which define the specialist-level degree as the entry level preparation criteria for school psychologists. Nevertheless, inconsistent use of the term, and the fact that multiple states (e.g., Montana, New Jersey) already engage in this practice to address shortages established the need to include guidance within the standards on RPR.

Programs and state education agencies (SEAs) that plan to pursue this option must consider the unique context and unintended consequences, most notably the potential to compromise quality service delivery to students, families, and schools. School psychologists receive a unique graduate preparation experience that applies psychological principles within an educational context. Certainly, some RPR programs may indeed help prepare exceptional school psychologists, though the general assumption that those in related fields could easily transition without substantial coursework and field experience could cause more harm than good. Therefore, graduate programs in school psychology and SEAs should take a measured approach to creating alternative pathways to state certification or licensure.

Similarly, individuals who consider pursuing RPR should be aware that obtaining a credential through this pathway is state specific and does not qualify the individual to obtain the National Certification of School Psychologists (NCSP) credential, nor does it necessarily qualify them to become credentialed in a different state.

## Recommended Procedures for RPR

Individuals who want to become credentialed as school psychologists should obtain a degree in school psychology. However, if this is not feasible, RPR may be considered as an alternative path to certification or licensure if the candidate possesses a graduate degree in psychology or in a related field (e.g., special education, school counseling, or school social work). States opting to offer RPR as a path to credentialing should establish formal procedures by which candidates are evaluated. Development of these procedures should occur through a collaborative effort between the SEA, the state's school psychology association, and NASP-approved or accredited graduate preparation programs within the state. These procedures should provide concrete action steps to complete the process and specify those responsible for implementation, with the intent of ensuring that those who pursue the RPR pathway possess the competencies expected of all school psychologists. Collaboration between the SEA and NASP-approved or accredited graduate preparation programs is vital throughout the process and may be accomplished by establishing a review committee or designating representatives from the SEA and graduate programs to conduct the review process. Key components that should be addressed in the procedures include:

- **Review of candidate documents.** The candidate's previous coursework and experiences (transcripts and syllabi, supervised field experiences, professional experiences and professional development) should be evaluated in comparison to the state's credentialing requirements, which should align with the NASP *Standards for the Credentialing of School Psychologists* and (especially) the NASP *Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services*. A review of the applicant's transcripts and coursework will identify specific content areas in which further coursework is needed. In addition to didactic coursework, candidates should show evidence of a 1,200-hour supervised internship with a minimum of 600 hours specific to school psychology in a school setting.<sup>1</sup> If a candidate believes that a prior internship might satisfy part of this requirement, they should formally document the experience, including activities completed, the setting, the supervision received, and the qualifications of the supervisor. However, it is expected that the candidate will attain internship experience (based on the NASP *Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services*) supervised by a credentialed school psychologist as the culminating event of the respecialization. The review of the candidate's prior preparation and experience should be conducted collaboratively between the SEA and school psychology graduate educators.
- **Development of RPR plan of study.** Based on the content areas that were identified for further training, the SEA and school psychology graduate educators should work with the candidate to develop a plan of study. A school psychologist designated by the SEA should identify specific coursework that meets the requirements for each specified content area. Approval of coursework may be achieved by directly assisting the candidate to identify courses, creating a crosswalk that

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<sup>1</sup> "A *school setting* is one in which the primary goal is the education of students of diverse backgrounds, characteristics, abilities, disabilities, and needs. Generally, a school setting includes children and youth who are enrolled in Grades pre-K–12 and has both general education and special education services. The school setting has available an internal or external pupil services unit that includes at least one state-credentialed school psychologist and provides a full range of school psychology services." (NASP, 2020)

displays sample courses for each content area, or by having a preapproval process. To facilitate this process, it is recommended to:

- Identify if there are school psychology programs in the state that will accept nondegree seeking students or if there are programs nationwide that offer online coursework (if the state views such coursework as equivalent).
- Determine whether it is feasible to require all RPR credits to be taken at the same program. While it is preferred to take all credits at the same graduate program to ensure a more organized program of study, this may not be feasible for all candidates (i.e., based on availability of coursework or if the candidate moves during their course of study).
- Determine whether it is feasible to require that all RPR credits be from a school psychology program. While it is preferred to take all credits from a school psychology program, some coursework requirements provided by other related programs (e.g., special education, clinical psychology) may be allowed depending on relevance, accessibility, and availability.
- **Monitoring completion.** Establish who will be responsible for determining successful completion of the plan of study and how it will be documented.
- **Determining ongoing needs upon certification.** Identify whether those going through the alternative process will:
  - Require ongoing formal documented field supervision for a period of time.
  - Require different requirements for renewal than those completing a more traditional pathway to certification or licensure.
  - Hold the same title and credential as other school psychologists in the state.

### Sample RPR Procedures

There are multiple ways in which states can apply the above-mentioned procedures. Some examples of how the components of the RPR procedures have been applied as of 2020 are as follows.

- **Review of documents**
  - *Example 1:* Using a comprehensive, collaborative process between the SEA, graduate educators, and school psychology practitioners, one state developed respecialization standards to guide the review process. Review of transcripts is conducted by a credentialing team made up of a school psychology graduate educator and one or two practicing school psychologists who are members of the state school psychology association. This team gives the applicant feedback on which previously taken coursework will fulfill standards, as well as what curricular deficiencies still remain.
  - *Example 2:* In one state, a process is used in which transcripts are reviewed independently by the SEA. Applicants pay a fee for the review and the SEA determines what aspects of the state credentialing requirements have been met and what aspects are still missing. The SEA then issues a letter that details how many credits are needed in each of the areas required for certification.
- **Completing coursework**
  - *Example 1:* In a state where the review of transcripts is conducted by a team of professionals, a graduate educator who participated in the review of transcripts helps the applicant to identify courses that cover the standards in the areas of reported curricular deficiencies. These courses must be taken for full credit (e.g., three credit hours at an institution on the semester system), at the graduate level, and from a NASP-approved or accredited school psychology program or regionally accredited college or university in the United States. The applicant must obtain a grade of B or better.
  - *Example 2:* In a state where the review of transcripts is conducted independently by the SEA, the applicant is responsible for contacting a graduate program independently and working with

- the graduate program to identify a plan of study that will meet the requirements stipulated by the SEA.
- While some graduate programs may have an application process for those interested in taking courses for RPR, other programs may allow nondegree seeking students to enroll in individual courses needed to meet requirements identified by the state.
  - Graduate programs may require the completion of additional coursework beyond that identified by the SEA as part of the RPR process.
- **Obtaining credentials.** Other procedures used by some states related to credentialing include:
    - RPR applicants who have met most, but not all, of the standards obtain a temporary, nonrenewable license to work in public schools while they finish remaining coursework deficiencies and obtain work experience.
    - Applicants are told that undertaking the RPR option does not guarantee reciprocity with other states' school psychology licensing standards. Applicants are also advised that the best route—in terms of geographic flexibility and ability to get licensed—is to finish a NASP-approved or accredited graduate preparation program in school psychology.

## CONCLUSION

NASP recommends that all states follow the NASP 2020 Professional Standards, which identify the specialist-level degree as the entry level of graduate preparation as a school psychologist. Nevertheless, the NASP 2020 Professional Standards provide new guidance on respecialization and professional retraining as some states look for temporary alternatives to help fill gaps and address shortages. All efforts for respecialization and professional retraining should use the NASP standards as a guide, and maintain ongoing collaboration among the SEA, state school psychology association, and local school psychology graduate programs.

## REFERENCES

- Crespi, T. D., & Politikos, N. N. (2004). Respecialization as a school psychologist: Education, training, and supervision for school practice. *Psychology in the Schools, 41*(4), 473–480.
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