



## Key Messages and Talking Points for School Psychologists Regarding Investments in Education

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 percent – 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, 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 level, 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 level.

**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
- increased investments in a well-rounded curricula and access to comprehensive learning supports

**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 a child’s education, or their life’s trajectory, should not be dictated by their zip code.**

- For the first time in recent history, the majority of students attending US public schools live in poverty.
- 90 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 percent of these costs, far below the 40% promised when the IDEA was approved.
- 67% 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 non-disabled 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 percent.

**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 on-going, 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 a 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 of providing 40% of the excess cost of educating students with disabilities when the IDEA was enacted.
  - 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 support 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.

