

Federal Public Policy and Legislative Platform

The vision of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is that all children and youth access the learning, behavior, and mental health support needed to thrive in school, at home, and throughout life. NASP promotes equitable access to a high-quality public education for *all students*, regardless of race, class, culture, language, gender, gender identity, gender expression, religion, sexual orientation, nationality, citizenship, ability, and other dimensions of difference. Furthermore, NASP is dedicated to ensuring that all children have positive, safe, supportive, welcoming, and inclusive environments that promote learning and are free of bullying, harassment, discrimination, and violence in order to support student learning and well-being. NASP firmly believes that all students are entitled to, and deserving of, an education that affirms and validates the diversity of their cultural and individual differences, fosters resilience, and facilitates well-being and positive academic and mental health outcomes.

Critical to this effort is ensuring adequate and equitable access to school psychologists and culturally responsive, comprehensive school psychological services, including: consultation and collaboration with families, teachers, and administrators to facilitate student learning; development and delivery of prevention, wellness promotion, and interventions and supports to promote students' academic achievement, social-emotional learning, and mental and behavioral health; school-wide practices that reinforce a safe and supportive learning environment; and crisis prevention, intervention, and response.

This Federal Public Policy and Legislative Platform represents overarching policy goals and recommendations that support the mission and vision of NASP. It promotes the guiding principles articulated in *Ready to Learn, Empowered to Teach*, and in NASP's position statements and resolutions. Furthermore, this platform outlines policy objectives designed to help advance the NASP strategic goals¹ and successful implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA). NASP commits to working with Congressional appropriators to ensure maximum federal investments in Title I, II, and IV of the ESSA; full funding of IDEA; and other grants and programs (some of which are explicitly included in this document) necessary for achieving our policy priorities. This document will be periodically updated to reflect new policy positions of the organization or emerging issues affecting school psychologists and the students they serve. Further, NASP commits to working to protect the civil rights of all students, including the rights articulated in IDEA and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Although this platform is specific to federal policy, state school psychology associations are encouraged to adapt these priorities to fit the specific advocacy and policy goals of their states and local districts.

¹ NASP's strategic plan, adopted by the Leadership Assembly on September 16, 2017, is available at <https://www.nasponline.org/x41409.xml>

I. Remedy the personnel shortages in school psychology.

- Ensure Congress, the Department of Education, and other relevant agencies prioritize technical assistance and guidance to support state and district efforts to *recruit and retain* school psychologists. This includes a long-term and sustained commitment to align staffing ratios with recommendations generated from national professional organizations. NASP recommends a ratio of 1 school psychologist for every 500–700 students in order to allow for the delivery of a full continuum of school psychological services, and it promotes efforts to increase the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the workforce in order to match an increasingly diverse student population.
- Ensure Health Service Corps Loan Forgiveness grants and other federal efforts to expand the availability of the behavioral health workforce include licensed and/or certified school psychologists.
- Preserve the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.
- Expand the focus of the Higher Education Act to include efforts to recruit and retain a qualified and diverse workforce of school psychologists.
- Ensure that federal financial aid is available to professionals who enter respecialization or retraining programs in order to meet state credentialing requirements to practice as school psychologists.
- Encourage Congress and/or the Department of Education and relevant credentialing bodies to create pathways to grant credentialing reciprocity for school psychologists across state lines, such as the Nationally Certified School Psychologist credential, to help remedy the shortages in rural and other underserved areas.
- Increase funding for Behavioral Health Workforce Grants, administered by HRSA, which provide financial support for school psychology interns with a specific focus on those serving in rural or underserved communities.
- Maintain inclusion of full-time equivalent school psychologists as a distinct reporting category in federal data collections, such as the Common Core of Data and other relevant collections maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics.
- Advance legislation that provides funds to help states increase access to fully certified and/or licensed school psychologists, especially in high need and hard to staff districts.
- Increase the pipeline of school psychology graduate students into high need areas and new graduate students entering school psychology programs through legislation to create targeted federal/university tuition assistance programs.
- Work with the Department of Education to pilot a grant program to create university–district partnerships that help recruit and train school-employed mental health professionals, including school psychologists, to create a pipeline for high need districts.

II. Ensure school and community environments are safe and supportive for all students.

- Oppose and resolve efforts that seek to systematically discriminate against children or youth on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, gender, gender identification, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability status, language proficiency, immigration status, or any other dimension of difference.
- Advance legislation that extends existing antidiscrimination and harassment protections to explicitly include real or perceived gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation.
- Advance efforts to ensure that Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is interpreted to include protection of transgender and gender diverse youth.

- Maintain funding for SAMHSA to convene the National LGBTQI2-S Workgroup.
- Support a federal ban on conversion/reparative therapy for youth.
- Continue the existing efforts of the Department of Education and other relevant agencies to designate resources to help implement evidence-based, school-wide policies and practices that reduce bullying, harassment, violence, and discrimination for *all* students regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, gender (including identification and expression), sexual orientation, disability status, language proficiency, immigration status, or any other dimension of difference.
- Reject efforts to abolish Gun Free School Zones.
- Support efforts to rigorously enforce existing gun laws.
- Support legislation that requires a comprehensive background check for all gun purchases.
- Support legislation to ban weapons that can cause mass destruction in a short period of time.
- Support legislation (e.g., Red Flag Laws) that seeks to prevent people who are of an immediate threat or danger to themselves or others from having access to firearms.
- Reject legislation that seeks to allow anyone other than a commissioned school resource officer (SRO) to be armed on school grounds.
- Support continued funding for scientific research about gun violence.
- Support efforts to ensure a stable education, and availability of evidence-based support, for children in transition, including homeless youth, children in foster care, migrant and refugee youth, and military connected youth.
- Support evidence-based efforts to prevent child abuse and human trafficking and to provide culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and gender-responsive care to victims.
- Support funding for the implementation of evidence-based, trauma-informed practices, including relevant professional development to ensure proper implementation.
- Support funding for high-quality, evidence-based, and job-embedded and discipline specific professional development for educators, specialized instructional support personnel, and other relevant staff in areas including but not limited to: implicit bias, antibullying, antiharassment, and antidiscrimination efforts; evidence-based threat assessment and management procedures; school-based violence prevention; positive discipline strategies; and restorative justice practices. All professional development should be culturally responsive.
- Support federal legislation, regulation, and policies that promote the use of effective, positive school discipline that: (a) functions in concert with efforts to address school safety and climate; (b) is not overly punitive (e.g., zero tolerance); (c) is clear, consistent, and equitable; (d) teaches and reinforces positive behaviors; (e) is not discriminatory nor results in the disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline with certain populations; and (f) does not contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline.
- Reject efforts that seek to increase zero tolerance policies and the use of exclusionary discipline (e.g., suspensions and expulsions).
- Support policies that prohibit school resource officers (SROs) and other school-based law enforcement from having any role in student discipline.
- Support efforts to prohibit the use of seclusion, chemical restraints, and mechanical restraints and to restrict the use of physical restraint to instances when there is a threat of imminent danger to students or staff.
- Support legislation to allow undocumented students to remain in the country legally without fear of deportation.

- Oppose harmful federal policies or rules that place unnecessary burdens on students or families who are undocumented that may affect a student’s ability to benefit from a high-quality instructional environment, including fostering behavioral, social, and emotional well-being.
- Support efforts to end the use of child detention centers.
- Support policy that allows families to remain together when they enter this country and prioritizes placement of unaccompanied minors entering this country with relatives as soon as possible.
- Support the creation and enforcement of standards of care that ensure children and families have access to safe and sanitary conditions (including access to food, water, and medical and psychological care) if they are held in U.S. custody.

III. Promote evidence-based comprehensive school safety and crisis response efforts.

- Allow for blended, flexible use of funding streams in education and mental health services at the federal, state, and local levels to support effective school safety.
- Promote comprehensive school safety efforts that emphasize both physical and psychological safety.
- Reject efforts to overly harden schools or to require physical security measures that are not evidence based or that do not increase actual or perceived safety.
- Support efforts that promote a comprehensive, whole-school approach to effective school safety through integration of school climate, positive and effective discipline, social–emotional learning, positive behavior, mental health, and academics through a multitiered systems of support (MTSS) and problem-solving model.
- Ensure school mental health services, including social–emotional learning, mental wellness, resilience, and positive connections between students and adults, are an essential component of all comprehensive school safety efforts.
- Support investments in training, planning, and professional development to encompass ongoing wellness promotion, prevention, and early intervention efforts as well as response and recovery plans in the event the unpreventable occurs.
- Work with relevant federal agencies and national organizations to promote policy and best practices to support evidence-based, multidisciplinary school based risk and threat assessment policy and practices; mental health evaluations and re-entry plans, including ongoing mental and behavioral health support for students identified as being of imminent threat to themselves or others; and enhanced student access to mental health supports in schools and communities.
- Promote school safety, threat assessment, and discipline policy and practice that protect the civil rights of all students and do not perpetuate the school to prison pipeline.
- Maintain funding for the National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments.
- Maintain funding for Project SERV, which helps school districts recover after crisis events.
- Maintain funding for the STOP School Violence Act.

IV. Increase access to comprehensive school mental and behavioral health services.

- Ensure that school psychologists are explicitly recognized as qualified providers of mental and behavioral health in statutes and regulations related to school based mental health services.
- Advance legislation that increases access to comprehensive school *and* community mental health services and reduces disparities in mental health service delivery, especially among underserved populations.

- Promote efforts to implement Youth Mental Health First Aid and other relevant professional development, including wellness promotion education, for educators to identify students with potential mental health concerns, connect them with appropriate school-employed mental health service providers, and facilitate referrals to appropriate community-based service providers to support a comprehensive continuum of care.
- Support efforts that require evidence-based suicide prevention training for school staff and evidence-based, developmentally appropriate suicide prevention programming for students.
- Advance efforts to increase funding to support evidence-based, trauma-informed practices in schools.
- Support investments to help schools and school districts implement evidence-based universal screening for mental and behavioral health concerns.
- Direct the Department of Education, Department Health and Human Services, and other relevant federal agencies to provide incentives, guidance, and technical assistance for school districts to prioritize the implementation of a multitiered system of supports (MTSS) framework that includes both academic and mental and behavioral health services (including trauma-informed practices and social–emotional learning). This guidance should emphasize the importance of access to school-employed mental health professionals (e.g., school psychologists, school social workers, school counselors) who can provide indirect consultative services to staff and families as well as a comprehensive range of services within the school context, ranging from direct individual-level services to systems-level wellness promotion, and prevention and intervention services.
- Ensure federal grants intended to improve school mental health service delivery, including the Full Service Community Schools program, advance school–community mental health partnerships that:
 - supplement, not supplant, existing school-based services;
 - clearly articulate the roles of school-employed and community-employed mental health professionals; and
 - foster coordination and collaboration between school and community mental health professionals.
- Demonstrate, through guidance from the Department of Education and other relevant agencies, how various funding streams can be used to provide ongoing, high-quality professional development related to effective delivery of high-quality comprehensive mental health services.
- Protect the existing structure of Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program to ensure that children from low income backgrounds have access to comprehensive healthcare that includes mental and behavioral health.
- Direct the Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services to update the Administrative Claiming Technical Assistance Guide, published in 1995, to reflect language in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that school psychologists are qualified providers of mental and behavioral health services. Furthermore, the guide should clarify that the language, “*Medicaid regulations require that provider qualifications be uniform and standard. This means that states cannot have one set of provider qualifications for school providers and another set of provider qualifications for all other providers,*” does not mean that school psychologists and other school professionals need to be credentialed to provide services in the school AND community setting in order to be considered a qualified provider of Medicaid services.

- Elevate the role of school psychologists as mental and behavioral health providers in relevant materials published by the Department of Education, relevant agencies, federally funded technical assistance centers, and publications by national organizations.

V. Ensure that all students have equitable access to comprehensive learning supports provided within an integrated service delivery system (e.g., MTSS).

- Promote efforts that provide funding and technical assistance to help schools and districts establish and maintain a positive school climate.
- Support efforts to expand access to high-quality early childhood education opportunities.
- Maintain existing statutory and regulatory language in current education legislation that allows federal funds to be used to implement MTSS and other tiered systems of support.
- Direct the Department of Education to release guidance for schools and districts about how to utilize school psychologists and other specialized instructional support personnel to help support the needs of all students, improve school climate, and improve school and student success.
- Promote efforts to improve intra-agency collaboration that facilitates systemic collaboration at the state and local levels.
- Advance efforts that facilitate the education of the whole child.
- Promote legislation/regulation that improves access to a comprehensive, rigorous, high-quality, and well-rounded curriculum that includes evidence-based literacy and mathematics instruction.
- Ensure that school psychologists and other specialized instructional support personnel are explicitly mentioned in legislation and other specific grant programs intended to address literacy, social-emotional learning, school climate, and other factors that promote student learning.
- Increase funding for the Technical Assistance Center for Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports and the National Center for Systemic Improvement to facilitate the implementation and scaling up of evidence-based efforts to improve comprehensive service delivery, student learning, and student well-being.
- Advance efforts to create an Office of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel within the Department of Education to facilitate coordinated and integrated service delivery for all students in schools and local education agencies.

VI. Improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

- Support efforts to ensure Congress fulfills their promise to provide 40% of the additional costs needed to meet federal mandates required by IDEA.
- Support efforts to ensure Congress and the Department of Education hold states and districts accountable to the high standards for all students as articulated in ESSA and IDEA.
- Maintain the disaggregated data reporting requirement mandated in ESSA, which ensures schools are meeting the academic, emotional, and behavioral needs of all student subgroups. Continue to hold states accountable for reporting this data in a manner that is accessible and easy to understand.
- Maintain data collection efforts to identify and intervene with schools that are disproportionately using exclusionary discipline practices with students with disabilities.
- Support initiatives that seek to engage families and community members to develop meaningful, ambitious, and comparable indicators to measure the progress of students with disabilities.
- Include instances of seclusion and restraint in federal discipline data collection and reports.
- Support efforts to ensure that students with disabilities are educated within the least restrictive environment as is appropriate for their specific needs.

- Recognizing a continuum of necessary supports from those students with the most severe disabilities to those with more frequent and everyday needs (e.g., ADHD), seek to secure federal funding that matches the level of student need specifically for evidence-based intervention.
- Ensure that any legislation/regulation intended to improve student outcomes promotes the use of evidence-based methods for the early identification of students with disabilities, including response to intervention within MTSS, and does not allow methods that may produce biased or inaccurate results (e.g., ability–achievement discrepancy method of identifying students with learning disabilities).
- Support investments in training, planning, and ongoing professional development of all educators in the use of necessary interventions and supports for students with disabilities.
- Support increased investment in early intervention and prevention programming that will reduce the number of students identified with disabilities, thus saving later resources and optimizing student outcomes.
- Advance legislation that supports the right to free appropriate public education (FAPE) for unauthorized immigrant students living in the United States.

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