



Key Messages and Talking Points to Promote the Comprehensive Role of School Psychologists

Advancing the comprehensive role of school psychologists, as defined by the NASP Practice Model, is essential to ensuring that all students have access to the full range of school psychological services they need to be successful. The NASP Practice Model delineates what services can reasonably be expected from school psychologists across 10 domains of practice and the general framework within which services should be provided.

When districts adopt the NASP Practice Model, it enables school psychologists to practice within a comprehensive role and greatly improves schools' capacity to meet the learning, social–emotional, and mental and behavioral health needs of students. There is growing recognition across the country of the need for more school psychologists, largely related to mental health, safety, and crisis. In reality, school psychologists' actual roles differ significantly from state to state and even between districts within states with some school psychologists serving exclusively in a special education assessment role, while others provide comprehensive academic, behavioral, and mental health services as well as work at the systems level to create safe, supportive learning environments for all students.

A variety of factors contribute to this variability, including a basic lack of awareness of school psychologists' training and skills and poor ratios that constrain school psychologists' capacity to provide more than legally mandated special education compliance services. NASP's recommended ratio is 1 school psychologist to every 500–700 students, yet in some states and districts the ratio is as high as 1:6,000+.

Improving awareness and ratios is imperative, and your voice is critical to this advocacy. The following talking points reflect NASP policy and best practice. They can be used to advocate for:

- adoption of the NASP Practice Model
- improving recognition of school psychologists' skills and expertise
- engaging school psychologists in school-wide needs assessments and school improvement efforts
- enabling school psychologists to provide wellness promotion and prevention services
- expanding school psychologists' role in multitiered systems of support
- leveraging school psychologists' expertise in data collection and analysis
- including school psychologists on school safety and crisis teams
- improving ratios

Select and adapt talking points to address the school psychologists' role in your community. Talking points are organized by each broad issue and may overlap. Depending on the current role for school psychologists in your school 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.

Use multiple advocacy strategies. Advocacy can take the form of meetings with your district administrators; presentations or written communication to school boards; op-eds for your local newspaper; and meetings, calls, or written communication to your state legislators, state board of education, and members of Congress. These are suggestions, and we urge you to consider the current context and climate of your community as you determine what actions could reasonably be accomplished to prevent school violence and improve school safety.

Advancing School Psychologists' Comprehensive Role

Key message: Districts and schools are better able to improve student and school outcomes when they adopt the NASP Practice Model.

- The NASP Practice Model facilitates the comprehensive role of the school psychologist and allows them to provide the full range of school psychological services, including: direct support and interventions to students; consultation with teachers, families, and other school-employed mental health professionals to improve academic and mental/behavioral support strategies; consultation and collaboration with school administrators to improve school-wide practices and policies; and collaborate with community providers to coordinate needed services.
- Implementation of the NASP Practice Model enables schools to make the best, most cost-effective use of school psychologists' skills and expertise, which are an existing but sometimes underutilized resource in schools.
- Schools can use the NASP Practice Model framework to work toward the recommended ratio of 1 school psychologist to 500–700 students while also improving the effective use of existing school psychologists.
- The NASP Practice Model allows flexibility for agencies and professionals to develop policies and procedures that meet local needs, while also providing sufficient specificity to ensure appropriate, comprehensive service provision.

Key message: The shortage of school psychologists makes it difficult for districts to implement the NASP Practice Model and enable school psychologists to practice their comprehensive role to meet the full range of student needs. (See Key Messages and Talking Points for Remediating the Shortages in School Psychology for more specific key messages and resources related to shortages.)

- The NASP recommended ratio of school psychologists to students is 1:500–700; however, the national average is 1:1,381, with some districts having 1 school psychologist for every 6,000+ students.
- School psychologists are trained to provide mental health services in the learning context. Services include mental health 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.

- Poor ratios are often caused by a combination of the lack of awareness, funding, adequate numbers of available professionals, and, in some states, limited or no school psychology graduate programs. Addressing the shortages is closely integrated with advancing the comprehensive role.

Key message: School psychologists help to improve academic engagement and achievement.

- High expectations and academic rigor for *all* students set the foundation for schools that both raise expectations and close achievement gaps. However, providing rich content and rigor alone is not enough for struggling students; they must have access to a full range of learning supports.
- School psychologists work with educators and families to identify and remedy barriers to learning, such as disabilities; mental or physical health problems; or social, cultural, language, or family issues that impact learning.
- School psychologists consult with teachers to help implement appropriate academic interventions by monitoring the effectiveness of academic interventions, developing student organizational skills, and promoting the use of evidence-based classroom learning strategies.
- School psychologists help students develop appropriate social–emotional and behavioral regulation strategies such as those that are designed to improve attention, strengthen motivation, and promote student problem-solving.
- Interventions that foster students’ engagement in learning contribute to more positive, orderly classroom environments, increase time focused on learning, and increase school attendance and graduation rates.

Key message: School psychologists have special expertise to help schools successful meet the needs of a wide range of diverse learners.

- School psychologists are trained to work with students who have disabilities or health problems, who face cultural or linguistic barriers, or whose family or socioeconomic situation affects their learning. Assess learning and behavior needs and distinguish between issues related to family, culture, or language and a learning style or disability
- School psychologists partner with teachers to plan appropriate Individualized Education Programs for students with disabilities, help to modify and adapt curricula and instruction, and adjust classroom facilities and routines to promote greater student engagement.
- School psychologists monitor and effectively communicate with parents about student progress, support effective family engagement in students school experiences, and coordinate connections with community services.
- School psychologists work with school administrators to ensure that education plans are designed and implemented so students with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environments.

Key message: School psychologists provide critical services to help meet the mental and behavioral health needs of students. (See Key Messages and Talking Points for Advancing School Psychologists as Mental and Behavioral Health Providers for more detailed information and resources.)

- Adopting the NASP Practice Model better enables schools to provide the full continuum of comprehensive school mental health services that include wellness promotion, resiliency, skill building, and help-seeking behaviors and a range of increasingly intensive individual and group interventions for students based on the level of need.
- One in five 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.

- Comprehensive school mental and behavioral health service delivery systems must include adequate access to school psychologists and other school-employed mental health professionals.
- School psychologists can provide important mental health services, including counseling, suicide risk assessment and intervention, behavior management, and threat assessment and interventions.

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: Schools psychologists provide services that improve teachers' 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 and implementation of comprehensive learning supports that help students progress through a rigorous curriculum and that 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: School psychologists help 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 message: School psychologists help schools improve assessment and accountability efforts.

- A critical part of making informed decisions is the effective use of data. School psychologists bring extensive knowledge of data collection and analysis to school improvement efforts.
- School psychologists can help school leaders and teachers generate and interpret student data to improve student and school outcomes.
- School psychologists work with teachers to monitor individual student progress toward academics and behavior goals.
- School psychologists can consult with school staff to make decisions regarding programs and interventions at the district, building, classroom, and individual student levels.
- School psychologists can collect and analyze data on risk and protective factors related to student outcomes.

Key Asks

- State/district adoption of the NASP Practice Model, which facilitates the comprehensive role of the school psychologist.
- 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.
- Inclusion of school psychologists on school leadership and school improvement teams.
- Increase of federal, state, and local funding streams to hire fully certified and/or licensed school psychologists, especially in high need and hard to staff districts.
- Maintaining a competitive salary and benefits package (including a stipend for the NCSP credential) to help recruit and retain high-quality school psychologists.
- Implementation of an effective supervision and mentoring program for early career school psychologists to help improve retention rates.
- Implementation or expansion of grant or loan forgiveness opportunities to increase the number of students entering and remaining in the field of school psychology.
- Creation of 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.
- Restriction, reduction, or limitation of alternate or emergency credentialing that allows related professionals to supplant school psychologists when providing school psychological services.

In a Nutshell: A Wise Investment of Existing Resources

School psychologists serve in almost every school in the country. They are a ready resource. Adopting the NASP Practice Model enables schools to make best use of their skills and expertise, and to give all students access to the services that can help them stay engaged and successful in school. School leaders and policy makers interested in moving service provision to the model can work with their school psychologists to assess current practice, resources, and steps toward implementation. NASP provides tools and further guidance to assist in this process; available online at www.nasponline.org/practicemodel. The comprehensive implementation of school psychological services has consistently been shown to support teachers' ability to teach and students' ability to learn and is a cost-effective investment in the success of all students.

Related Resources

NASP Practice Model Brochure

https://www.nasponline.org/assets/Documents/Standards%20and%20Certification/Standards/2_PracticeModel.pdf

NASP Practice Model Implementation Guide

<https://www.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/nasp-practice-model/nasp-practice-model-implementation-guide>

Excellence in School Psychological Services Recognition Program

[https://www.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/nasp-practice-model/excellence-in-school-psychological-services-\(esps\)-recognition-program](https://www.nasponline.org/standards-and-certification/nasp-practice-model/excellence-in-school-psychological-services-(esps)-recognition-program)

Who Are School Psychologists Brochure

<https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/who-are-school-psychologists>

Who Are School Psychologists Infographic

https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Membership%20and%20Community/Who%20Are%20School%20Psychologists%20Infographic_FINAL.png

School Psychologists: We Can Help, NASP Core Messages

https://www.nasponline.org/assets/Documents/About%20School%20Psychology/NASP_Core_Messages_2012.pdf

School Psychologists: Improving Student and School Outcomes

<https://www.nasponline.org/x26669.xml>

Shortages in School Psychology Resource Guide

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-psychology/shortages-in-school-psychology-resource-guide>