

School Psychologists' Involvement in Assessment

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recognizes that school psychologists are uniquely suited to promote best practices in assessment. Assessment is the process of gathering information to guide educationally relevant decisions. The process and products of assessment contribute to defining problems, identifying student assets and needs, determining current levels of the student functioning, estimating the rate of progress toward well defined goals, evaluating and recommending services to accelerate learning, and evaluating program outcomes (Ysseldyke et al., 2007).

School psychologists engage in assessment to promote academic competence and mental health for all children. This includes those children served with universal, supplemental, intensive, and special education services. NASP endorses science-based assessment practices that are tailored to the needs and assets of individuals, groups, and systems. Assessment services that are aligned with instruction and intervention are provided to promote development, prevent delays, and remediate deficits.

ROLES OF THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

School psychologists are well trained to select, administer, and interpret assessment. They are prepared to both plan and coordinate the process of assessment to guide educationally relevant decisions. School psychologists confer meaningful and lasting benefit to children, families, and schools through evidenced-based assessment. School psychologists consider key guiding principles and purposes of assessment, as described below, when participating in assessment activities.

Guiding Principles

NASP offers a number of guiding principles for school psychologists who engage in assessment:

- ***School psychologists practice with beneficence.*** They strive to confer benefit and, at a minimum, to do no harm. Data are collected, reported, and used in a manner that minimizes the potential for misuse and misinterpretation by other professionals or lay persons.
- ***School psychologists practice with integrity and a scientific basis.*** They adhere to legal and ethical standards of practice (NASP, 2000a, 2000b) and safeguard the rights of students. School psychologists use the appropriate assessment instruments and techniques for the purposes that they were designed and for which there is supporting evidence.
- ***School psychologists are knowledgeable.*** They are familiar with the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (AERA, APA, NCME, 1999) and principles of assessment. School psychologists select and employ assessments in a manner consistent with available evidence and rely on multiple measures to guide high-stakes educational decisions.

- ***School psychologists consider diversity.*** They consider and adapt assessment practices to ensure fair and valid data collection and data use. School psychologists consider, accommodate, and provide appropriate modifications for all aspects of diversity that might impact assessment results, such as sensory acuity, motor skills, language, and cultural differences. School psychologists interpret and report outcomes in a manner that communicates the limitations of their assessments, data, and interpretations.
- ***School psychologists employ a range of assessment methods that are sensitive to contextual influences.*** They use a multimethod, multisource, and multisetting approach to assessment. The multiple methods of assessment include, but are not limited to, the use of record reviews, observations, interviews, and various forms of formal and informal testing. The multiple sources of information include, but are not limited to, parents, teachers, administrators, peers, students, curriculum materials, instructional procedures, and ecological conditions. The multiple settings include, but are not limited to, the classroom, hallway, playground, home, and analog situations that are used for controlled or standardized observation.
- ***School psychologists are skilled at interpreting assessment data.*** They synthesize and report information in a manner that can be understood by educators and parents, and used to inform instruction and improve educational outcomes.
- ***School psychologists act as problem solvers.*** They identify and collect information that is relevant to the purpose of assessment. Common purposes of assessment include problem identification, problem analysis, progress monitoring, program evaluation, and eligibility determination.

Educational Decisions and Evaluations

NASP recognizes that assessment data are used to guide a wide variety of educationally relevant decisions. The type and amount of assessment data that are required are determined by the purpose of the assessment and relative stakes of the educational decision. Decisions can be classified along a spectrum from low stakes to high stakes. Low stakes decisions include those made by individual educators to guide routine decisions, which are frequent and reversible. Those decisions are guided by data from less formal and less rigorous assessments. In contrast, higher stakes decisions are less routine, less frequent, and less reversible. For example, diagnostic and special education eligibility decisions are high stakes. Those decisions are guided by data from more formal and rigorous assessment procedures. Those procedures, instrumentation, and results are associated with demonstrable technical adequacy, and such decisions rely on multiple assessment methods and sources of data. A limited set of educational decisions and evaluative purposes are listed below. Although they are some of the more common purposes of assessment, they are not the only purposes of assessment. School psychologists engage in a wide variety of assessments to address a wide variety of questions.

- ***Routine Classroom Decisions.*** There are a variety of routine classroom decisions that are informed by less formal assessments, which have unknown or modest technical adequacy. Less formal assessments often contribute those data that are routinely recorded in grade books, teacher logs/notes, and notes between home and school. NASP recognizes that routine classroom decisions are dynamic, numerous, and of relatively low-stakes, so it is often appropriate to use less formal approaches to assessment. The quantity and accumulation of data from less formal assessments often provide adequate guidance to serve students who are typically functioning.

Supplemental assessment is necessary to guide service delivery for students with atypical functioning.

- **Screening Decisions.** Routine screening is necessary to ensure that students are making adequate progress and to identify students with deficit levels and rates of achievement within critical domains of academic and mental health. Effective systems screen at least annually and often three to four times per year. Screening assessments are critical to effective service delivery at the individual, group, and systems levels; therefore, they are ‘moderate stakes’ assessments that should be conducted using measures of appropriate technical adequacy. Screening data are used to guide resource allocation to prevent and remediate problems by allocating resources to prevent and remediate deficits.
- **Problem Definition and Certification.** Assessment guides the allocation of resources for the purpose of problem prevention and remediation. Problems should be measured and quantified whenever supplemental or intensive resources are allocated to prevent or remediate deficit levels and increase rates of development. In conjunction with other educational decisions and evaluations, it is critical that problems be well defined and certified in a manner that is meaningful, measurable and monitorable.
- **Problem Analysis for Instruction/Intervention Planning.** Assessment for the purpose of problem analysis occurs to identify the causal and maintaining variables that contribute to educational problems at the individual, group, and system levels. Problem analysis occurs to isolate intervention targets and provide recommendations for instruction and intervention. These decisions are intended to optimize the match between student needs and services that are provided.
- **Program Evaluation and Accountability.** Instruction and intervention services should be assessed using summative, interim, and formative assessment. Summative assessment data, such as end of the year assessments and statewide testing, should be used routinely to evaluate the effect of core, supplemental, and intensive services at the system, group, and individual levels respectively. Interim assessments, which occur three to four times annually, and formative assessments, which are used at least monthly, are used strategically to evaluate program effects over brief periods.
- **Diagnostic and Eligibility Decisions.** The data collected and used to guide each of the previously listed educational decisions are integrated and synthesized as part of diagnostic and eligibility decisions. These are high-stakes decisions that substantially impact the lives of students and their families. School psychologists rely on a multimethod, multisource, and, often, multisetting approach to assessment as they function within a multidisciplinary team.

School psychologists engage in the process of assessment. They help consumers understand multiple types of assessment outcomes and how to make the best use of those outcomes. Their skills and expertise in assessment can be applied for a variety of purposes that contribute to data-based decision making and enhance academic and behavioral childhood outcomes.

SUMMARY

NASP recognizes that school psychologists are highly qualified to conduct individualized assessments. They are also skilled to collaborate with teachers and other educators to design, implement, and interpret various types of assessments on both the individual and group level. The results of such assessments provide useful information to guides educational decisions and improve childhood outcomes.

NASP recognizes that assessment should be closely linked to instruction and intervention to provide useful data that guides educational decisions and improves childhood outcomes. Along with considerations about the quality of assessment, school psychologists consider the type of data that are collected and how findings are used to improve outcomes. Assessment should be closely linked to instruction and intervention. Outcomes should inform practice.

NASP recognizes that assessment is much more than testing. Although testing is often a part of assessment activities, comprehensive assessment requires a multimethod, multisource, and multisetting approach. School psychologists function to ensure appropriate information is generated through the assessment process and use that information to provide adequate guidance with regard to well defined educational questions and evaluative purposes.

NASP recognizes and enumerates explicit standards and guidelines for assessment practices. These standards and guidelines highlight beneficence along with the scientific foundation and purposes of assessment. NASP endorses continual professional development as a means for school psychologists to stay current on assessment methodologies.

REFERENCES

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